“A Challenge and A Danger”

Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis

By

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Abstract

President John F. Kennedy’s announcement, on Monday 22 October 1962, that there were offensive missiles on the island of Cuba began the public phase of what would be remembered as the Cuban missile crisis. This Cold War crisis had ramifications in many other countries than just the Soviet Union and the United States. Due to the danger involved in this nuclear confrontation, the entire globe was threatened. If either side lost control of negotiations, an atomic war could have broken out which would have decimated the planet. As the direct northern neighbors of the United States and partners in continental defence, Canadians experienced and understood the Cuban missile crisis in the context of larger issues.

In many ways, Canadian and American reactions to the crisis were similar. Many citizens stocked up their pantries, read the newspapers, protested, or worried that the politicians would make a mistake and set off a war. However, this dissertation argues that English Canadians experienced the crisis on another level as well. In public debate and print sources, many debated what the crisis meant for Canadian-Cuban relations, Canadian-American relations and Canada’s place in the world. Examining these print and archival sources, this dissertation analyzes the contour of public debate during the crisis, uniting that debate with the actions of politicians. Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker hesitated for two days before making a statement which fully committed Canada to a position which supported the American quarantine of Cuba, and shortly after the crisis, was defeated at the polls. This dissertation argues that understanding the Canadian reaction to and experience of the Cuban missile crisis necessitates an understanding of how different Canadians talked about and understood the actions of
their leaders. The shifting terrain of memory also serves to demonstrate the manner in which this history is told and remembered in Canada. This dissertation, therefore, examines the intersections between this Cold War confrontation and Canadian identity in the postwar period.
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To my parents and my partner I owe the biggest debt of all. Even though my family never quite understood why I wanted to pursue history, nor why I rambled on somewhat incoherently about missiles in Cuba or duck-and-cover drills in the United States, I always knew that they had unshakable faith in me. It is to my mother, from whom I’ve learned passion for my profession, integrity, and the ever-lasting love of a good argument, and my father, who read every single word of this thesis (even the ones that eventually got cut), that this thesis is dedicated. This work is also dedicated to my partner Michel, whose love for history and a good debate equal mine. His uncanny ability to listen and belief in my ability was essential to my progress, and sanity, throughout the writing of this dissertation.
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Chapter One – Canada and the Missiles on “That Imprisoned Island”

At 7 p.m. on Monday, 22 October 1962, American President John F. Kennedy appeared on television. He announced that there were missiles in Cuba, and they were pointed at the United States. This speech began the public phase of the Cuban missile crisis, and was for many the most terrifying episode of the entire Cold War. The Cuban missile crisis was the most public moment during the Cold War in which the world came face to face with the immediate threat of nuclear war. The anxiety and tension of that week unites historical accounts. While not everyone rushed out to the grocery stores to stock up on canned goods and water for their home fallout shelter, many did pay attention to the news and worried over the possibility that something would go wrong, that the leaders would lose control of the situation, and that the so-called button would be pushed.

Canadians, as the direct northern neighbors to the United States, were also threatened by the missiles in Cuba. Newspapers across the country declared that the missiles in Cuba had the capability to hit Canada as far north as Hudson’s Bay and as far west as Regina. There was also the ever-present fear of fallout drifting across the country, creating a nuclear winter. Simply because this was a political confrontation between John F. Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev, and Fidel Castro did not mean that Canadians living in Victoria or Halifax would not feel the effects if the situation spiraled out of control. Canadians across the country paid a great deal of attention to the actions of the politicians who had landed the world in this situation to begin with. Protesters in Toronto and Montreal marched in front of the American embassy. In Vancouver, students at the University of British Columbia gathered to hear their professors speak
about Kennedy’s action. Later in the week, engineering students from the same university marched to City Hall and shot “Fidel Castro” (actually a fellow student) in effigy with water pistols. Canadians in the navy and air force prepared themselves for the possibility of war. Others discussed, in newspapers and in their living-rooms, the danger of Kennedy’s ultimatum, and Khrushchev’s recklessness in putting the missiles in Cuba in the first place. They questioned whether Castro and the Russians really thought they would be able to pull it off without the Americans finding out, and whether or not they realized there would be repercussions.

There have been hundreds, possibly thousands, of books and articles written about the Cuban missile crisis. Politicians, journalists, historians and citizens have discussed those “thirteen days” from a variety of angles. However, this study proposes that an important aspect has been missing from the historical record. At the core of the crisis were the individuals who experienced it. Across the world, people paid greater attention to their radios, newspapers and television sets as the drama unfolded on Monday night. Throughout the week, they listened to news of ultimatums, threats, and dramatic displays of brinkmanship. Canadian politicians did not have a significant role in either making or resolving the Cuban missile crisis, but Canadians experienced it. Simply because they did not reside in one of the principal countries involved did not make them any less interested in the outcome. In fact, likely because they had little control over the outcome, they may have been more interested in how events unfolded. Thus, one of the primary goals of this study is to discuss how English Canada experienced the Cuban missile crisis. When the focus is shifted away from the halls of power in Washington and
Moscow, or even from Havana and Ottawa, different experiences of these events appear in the historical record.

Canadians experienced the Cuban missile crisis, but so too did the rest of the world. It was a global event because the entire globe was threatened. What makes this a Canadian story is *how* the country experienced the missile crisis. As the drama unfolded, many Canadians held vibrant debates about how they should be involved, what their Prime Minister could do to help resolve the crisis, what they as individuals could do to prepare for war in case diplomacy failed, and most importantly, what the crisis meant for Canada’s place in the world. As Kennedy and Khrushchev sent telegrams and emissaries back and forth, Canadians absorbed news of the crisis and debated what its (hopefully peaceful) resolution meant for Canada’s future. Even though the country’s role as a mediator was relatively new, a reputation for negotiation in international crises was quickly becoming a fundamental part of its national identity. Many believed that as a peaceable middle power, they should do something to help. This complemented nicely Canada’s post-Second World War role as a middle power. Even as they disagreed on the exact means, many Canadians fervently believed that Canada’s reaction during the crisis mattered.

Canadians experienced the Cuban missile crisis, and they experienced it in a distinctive and active manner. These are the first two arguments made in this study. The third argument is about the manner in which this history is told. The Cuban missile crisis was a moment in history where the “postwar” period and the “Cold War” period intersect. This moment also united the 1950s and the 1960s. It is helpful to conceptualize this event as located at the center of various intersections, or in the middle
of a web. William H. Sewell calls such transformative historical moments “events” which are a “relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transforms structures” and ought not to be thought of as either born of a uniform causal law across time nor of the causal interdependence between events.¹ In order to understand how an event changes the structure of a society, it is necessary to forget the manner in which we know it was resolved. If the past is treated as a foregone conclusion, then the various ways it could have happened are obscured. Those possibilities can tell us a great deal about what was happening, about potential different trajectories and thus about the meaning of a given event.

Thus, the Cuban missile crisis marked an important shift in political and social forces. But how can historians see these forces nearly fifty years later? In Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945, Melani McAlister examines how various aspects of society – popular culture, public debates, news media, religious and social movements – worked together in “a web of meanings that have often facilitated – and sometimes challenged – the expansion of U.S. power in the Middle East, even as they worked to construct a self-image for Americans of themselves as citizens of a benevolent world power.”² Epic Encounters makes two key contributions. McAlister argues that the making of foreign policy has a “significant cultural component.”³ This dissertation contributes to the growing body of literature

³ Ibid., p. 5.
which recognizes this important insight. Secondly, McAlister argues “that understanding the political import of culture requires that we position cultural texts in history, as active producers of meaning, rather than assuming that they merely ‘reflect’ or ‘reproduce’ some preexisting social reality.” Discussions in newspapers did not simply report what people thought of Diefenbaker’s performance during the missile crisis, for example. These discussions shaped the shifting parameters of the debate. Social trends that were part of the “postwar” world, such as the focus on youth, consumerism, and suburbanization, are also key in understanding this episode of the Cold War. To think of postwar histories as separate from Cold War episodes is to miss a great deal of meaning. These forces existed together as part of the “web of meaning” which provides vital context for this historical event. This study argues that it is in the intersections between these traditionally distinct historiographical schools that the experience of the Cuban missile crisis in Canadian society is found. This, therefore, is a study about how English Canada understood its place in the world. Many Canadians during the missile crisis discussed how they saw it affecting their daily lives, their relationship with Cuba and with the United States, and their place in the world.

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5 McAlister, Epic Encounters, p. 5, original emphasis.
This thesis explores Canadian reaction to the Cuban missile crisis as it appeared in print sources such as newspapers and letters to the Prime Minister. The key themes which were expressed in these sources centered around Canada’s relationship and perception of two countries in particular: Cuba and the United States. For many in Canada, the missiles in Cuba were not merely a matter of continental security. Canada’s trade relationship with Cuba was different than that of the United States, and many believed that the crisis could alter that relationship. Many Canadians utilized their common understandings, stereotypes and perceptions as a way to talk about Canada’s relationship with Cuba and the United States during this moment of crisis. While the U.S. and Cuba figure significantly in these sources, many Canadians did not discuss their country’s relationship with the Soviet Union. Perhaps this was because no one expected or feared that relationship would change as a result of the crisis; as the superpower on the other side of the ideologically defined Cold War, there was no doubt or discussion about where Khrushchev stood on the matter.

There are both advantages and problems involved with doing a national study of this sort. What is meant by “Canadian” in this context? Who is included, and more importantly, who is not? Given the nature of this study and the sources used, it is the unfortunate reality that the Canadian story told here is of English Canada, and of the mainstream. It is the story of those who made their voices heard in letters to editors of English-language newspapers and the Prime Minister. The distinct voices of racial or ethnic minorities are not obvious in these sources, and the opinions of men outweigh those of women. The French Canadian understanding of the Cuban missile crisis is not evident here. While one newspaper from Quebec is included, it is an Anglophone
newspaper and does not represent the entire province or French Canadian reaction. This is certainly a limitation. However, rather than subsuming what was happening in Quebec and Francophone society within this history of English Canada’s response, I chose to leave this particular story to those who are far better equipped to tell it. Therefore, in the following pages, English Canada is specified where necessary, to remind the reader that this is only part of the larger story.

While the drawbacks are not insignificant, there are a number of advantages of a national study such as this as well. A national cross-section allows for larger connections and comparison between regions. There was no significant east-west divide, nor was there a marked rural-urban split. Within the same newspaper, for example, there were Canadians both strongly for and against Kennedy’s blockade. Some Canadians wrote that they were in favour of Cuba standing up for itself and accepting defensive nuclear weapons, whereas the next day in the same paper, another individual would call this line of thinking “Communist” and insist that Castro be defeated. The national narrative, as a result, allows analysis of larger themes and illustration of changing trends over time.

Thus, this thesis examines the Canadian experience of the Cuban missile crisis as a whole.

**Histories of the Cuban Missile Crisis**

To better understand the concept of a “web of meanings” and to demonstrate how the various historiographies work together to provide a context for the Cuban missile crisis, it is first necessary to understand what has already been written. As mentioned above, the number of works written about the Cuban missile crisis is significant. It has
been covered from American, Soviet and Cuban perspective, from the British and even, to a certain extent, from the Canadian perspective. It has been covered from personal, political, military, intelligence, psychological, and cultural angles. It will likely continue to be studied as more sources are declassified and popular myths debunked. Here, I will discuss the major works from the American, Soviet, Cuban, and Canadian perspectives, highlighting key themes as they relate to this study and how they have changed over time.

In the American historiography, one of the first studies of the missile crisis to be published was Elie Abel’s work, *The Missile Crisis*. Neither particularly academic nor historical in its focus, it was nevertheless the first book-length treatment of the crisis. Drawing on the recollections of the individuals involved, Abel pieces together the story of what happened in the White House from Sunday 14 October until the last public day of the crisis, Sunday, 28 October. A day-by-day depiction of the moments of the crisis which were most tense, Abel shows the reader how close the world came to nuclear war. In his estimation, the world was saved by the men in the White House who carefully negotiated their way through the crisis. Other works written by direct participants are similar to Abel’s recounting. Robert Kennedy also wrote *Thirteen Days* from an insider’s perspective. Published posthumously, both Robert and especially John F. Kennedy are painted in a flattering light. In addition to the Attorney General, at least two other White House insiders also wrote accounts of the Cuban missile crisis. Dino Brugioni wrote from the perspective of the photograph analysis and intelligence unit. Responsible for

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6 See, for example, Nigel John Ashton, *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (Houndsmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).
helping interpret the various photos that came in from U-2 flights, he argues that it was years of painstaking research and intelligence gathering that led to the discovery and photo confirmation of missiles in Cuba, not simply sheer luck.\(^9\) Another insider account was written by Raymond Garthoff. His *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis* is remarkable for its inclusion of the Soviet perspective, which at the time of publication had not yet been attempted.\(^10\)

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a series of conferences were held which attempted to include the major participants of the crisis and create conversations between different viewpoints. This was not truly accomplished until the last conference in 1992, which was held in Havana, Cuba. These conferences, and the books produced from the proceedings, have had an enormous impact on the historiography of the crisis.\(^11\) Each successive conference and book made a greater effort to include all the historical actors. Although Kennedy and Khrushchev had long since passed away, Fidel Castro attended the last conference. The last book of the series makes a most astute observation, and is the most important contribution to the literature. This book “issues a warning that is highly pertinent for our times: decision makers and scholars will err if they ignore the mighty effect that small countries may have in international affairs.”\(^12\)

\(^12\) Blight, Allyn and Welch, *Cuba on the Brink*, p. x.
There have also been significant theoretical advances in the interpretation of the Cuban missile crisis. Graham Allison’s work *Essence of Decision*, first published in 1971, and later revised and republished with Philip Zelikow, asks some of the same questions about the missile crisis as have other scholars: why did the Soviets put missiles in Cuba in the first place? Why did the United States respond with a naval quarantine? Why were the missiles withdrawn? What are the “lessons” of the crisis? In posing these questions, Allison reveals the assumptions that were made during the crisis. Why, for instance, did the Americans think there were only two possible reactions: blockade or air-strike? Why were other options never seriously considered? Allison thus suggests frameworks through which we can question the resolution of the crisis, and therefore suggest more nuanced explanations for why it happened in the first place.

The end of the Cold War and the opening of Soviet archives has brought about an explosion of interest in the missile crisis. Since the early 1990s, a number of academic works have been published exploring the missile crisis from a variety of angles. This

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14 Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) also suggests that a new theoretical approach to the missile crisis is required, and asks how the situation went from missiles in Cuba to the Cuban missile crisis. In answering this question, she seeks to demonstrate the constructed nature of American foreign policy.
process was expedited by the release of the tapes of the meetings of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (the ExComm), which were published with commentary. The role of American missiles in Turkey has been examined by Philip Nash in his work, *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Jupiters, 1957-1963*. Nash explores the history of the Jupiter missiles, why they were placed in Turkey in the first place, and why they were still there in October 1962. He debunks the myth that Kennedy was unaware that they were still in place, despite orders to have them removed months before the missile crisis broke out. The missiles were, frankly, obsolete even by the time they were fully installed. It was a combination of Cold War politics and concern over credibility that allowed the Jupiters to be placed in American NATO partner countries in the first place. Nevertheless, the role the Jupiters in Turkey played in the Cuban missile crisis was significant.

Other post-Cold War reassessments of the Cuban missile crisis integrate the Soviet perspective, such as in Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali’s “*One Hell of a Gamble:*” *The Secret History of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, or on the psychological toll that the crisis had on the leaders who had to make the difficult decisions, such as James G. Blight’s *The Shattered Crystal Ball: Fear and Learning in the Cuban Missile Crisis*.

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The missile crisis has also been examined from a social and cultural perspective in the United States by Alice George in her work, *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*. George argues that “the missile crisis represented a dangerous intersection between Cold War culture and nuclear politics…During the crisis, Kennedy danced along a razor’s edge that separated rigid Cold War dogma from the concrete devastation of nuclear war.” Michael Dobbs also tells the story of the missile crisis in his work, *One Minute to Midnight: Kennedy, Khrushchev, and Castro on the Brink of Nuclear War*. Dobbs’ work is unique for telling the entire story from many perspectives, rather than from a national slant. Finally, one of the most excellent and objective surveys of the missile crisis is *The Cuban Missile Crisis: A Concise History*, written by Don Munton and David Welch. Intended as a survey text for university classrooms, it nevertheless contains keen insights and includes historiographical debates surrounding this controversial historical moment.

While there exist a number of books from the American perspective on the Cuban missile crisis, there are significantly fewer studies (in English) of the Soviet and Cuban perspectives. As mentioned above, Garthoff and Blight and Welch make an effort at including the Soviet perspective in their examinations of the missile crisis. There are, however, other works available to a Western audience which detail the Soviet side of the

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20 Ibid., p. 5.
24 See Garthoff, *Reflections* and Blight and Welch, *Americans and Soviets Reexamine*. 
story. Khrushchev’s memoir is one of these sources. Khrushchev Remembers explains that the decision to place missiles in Cuba stemmed from real concern over the success of the Cuban revolution, and fear of an American intervention or invasion, if concrete steps toward enhancing Cuba’s defence were not taken. While this argument seems reasonable, it is controversial. Many American perspectives of the missile crisis at this time discounted this as Khrushchev’s main reason, and believed that Cold War concerns, and the ability to quickly strike at the United States, was Khrushchev’s primary motive.

Other western sources examine the Caribbean crisis from a Soviet perspective as well. Daniela Spenser has examined Soviet policy regarding Cuba during and in the aftermath of the Caribbean crisis. The overall goal of the anthology in which her article is published is to push Cold War studies away from binary examinations which address geopolitical concerns only of the United States and Soviet Union. In this analytical framework, Spenser argues that the Caribbean crisis was a watershed for Soviet policy in Latin America. Both Cuba and the Soviet Union emerged from the crisis with diminished power. This resulted in increased tension for a number of years. One of the most significant consequences for the Soviet Union was that it set a precedent of more support for armed movements than initially intended. As a result, the Cuban missile

26 Ibid., p. 493.
27 The title “Cuban missile crisis” is a western phenomenon. Soviet accounts have dubbed it the Caribbean crisis, since, according to Blight, Allyn and Welch, it involved more than the missiles on Cuba, and certainly spanned longer than the American accounts of thirteen days in October. Cuban accounts of the same crisis term it the “October crisis” to distinguish it from various other crises which occurred in this same period. Here, it will largely be referred to as the Cuban missile crisis, since the majority of the sources used in this study refer to it as such.
crisis was significant in Soviet foreign policy for a number of years, especially with regards to China. In addition to Spenser, there are a number of other works that deal with the Soviet perspective of the missile crisis and range from military accounts to Khrushchev biographies.

The Cuban perspective of the crisis is also difficult, although not impossible, to access. As mentioned above, Blight, Allyn and Welch argue that Cuba’s actions had serious implications for the superpowers. There have, however, also been a number of authors who have explained the Cuban perspective of the crisis. Carlos Lechuga and Tomás Diez Acosta are two examples. At the time of the crisis, Castro brought in Lechuga to serve as Cuba’s ambassador to the United Nations. His book on the missile crisis, In the Eye of the Storm: Castro, Khrushchev, Kennedy and the Missile Crisis (later reprinted as Cuba and the Missile Crisis) is the story of the crisis from his perspective within Castro’s government and the United Nations. Lechuga argues that the main reason the missile crisis occurred was American hostility and harassment. “The United States,” he writes, “harassed and harried Cuba on all fronts with subversion, the economic blockade, sabotage in Cuba’s key production centers, numerous attempts to kill

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29 Ibid.
31 Blight, Allyn and Welch, Cuba on the Brink, p. x. For another, more sensational telling of the Caribbean perspective of the crises of this period and of the manner in which the Cold War played out in the Caribbean, see Alex von Tunzelmann, Red Heat: Conspiracy, Murder, and the Cold War in the Caribbean (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011).
32 These Cuban interpretations are notoriously marked by political motives. They are full of talk of American imperialists and socialist politics, but this does not, however, necessarily mean that their value as historical sources is diminished. In fact, it only means that their biases are more obvious; western, and in particular American, academic sources are often just as full of bias and politics, but are not as obvious, and thus perhaps more insidious.
Fidel Castro and other leading Cuban revolutionaries, and growing threats of direct
aggression by regular forces of the United States. That – nothing else – was the root of
the dangerous confrontation, in which Cuba was a strategic objective.”33 While global
forces helped create this dangerous situation, it was the Caribbean, and in particular,
Cuba, where these forces clashed, creating an “unprecedented threat to world peace.”34
This work argues that Cuba was betrayed by Khrushchev and the Soviet Union when they
secretly agreed to Kennedy’s deal to remove the missiles in October 1962.35

Tomás Diez Acosta tells the history of the Cuban missile crisis from the military’s
perspective. Diez was born in 1946 and joined Cuba’s Revolutionary Armed Forces in
1961, just before the missile crisis. A prolific writer in Spanish, two of his works on the
missile crisis have also been translated to English. His perspective on the missile crisis
can be deduced from the opening lines of the preface of his work, October 1962: The
‘Missile’ Crisis As Seen From Cuba: “In October 1962, during what is widely known as
the Cuban Missile Crisis, Washington pushed the world to the precipice of nuclear
war.”36 Drawing from archival resources as well as interviews with participants, Diez
argues that the missile crisis needs to be seen in the context of American policy towards
Cuba as a whole, which includes Operation Mongoose and the Bay of Pigs. It is only
through this approach that a full understanding of what happened and why can be
achieved. Looking beyond the halls of power, Diez argues that “it was the armed
mobilization and political clarity of the Cuban people, and the capacities of their

33 Carlos Lechuga, Cuba and the Missile Crisis, trans. Mary Todd (Melbourne and New York: Ocean Press,
34 Ibid., p. 5.
36 Tomás Diez Acosta, October 1962: The ‘Missile’ Crisis As Seen From Cuba (New York: Pathfinder,
2002), p. 11.
revolutionary leadership, that stayed Washington’s hand, saving humanity from the consequences of a nuclear holocaust.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 13. See also, Tomás Diez Acosta, \textit{In the Threshold of Nuclear War: The 1962 Missile Crisis}, trans. Ormán José Batista Peña (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 2002).} Cuba’s perspective, then, is radically different from that of Washington and even Moscow, but no less accurate. Diez thus incorporates the everyday Cuban perspective into the history of the Cuban missile crisis.

**The History of the Cuban Missile Crisis in Canada**

In addition to works from the American, Soviet and Cuban perspectives, there are a number of scholarly works detailing the Canadian experience of the Cuban missile crisis. The earliest of these were written by journalists who knew the politicians and were themselves figures in the political world in Ottawa. They focus on Diefenbaker’s indecisiveness during the crisis, and claim that it was inherent weakness of character at the root of his and his government’s (in)action during the crisis. Peter Newman, for example, wrote of what he saw as Diefenbaker’s biggest flaw as a leader in his work, \textit{Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years}.\footnote{Peter Newman, \textit{Renegade in Power: The Diefenbaker Years} (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1963).} Newman argued that Diefenbaker was a remarkable politician because he had so much potential. He had captured the hearts and minds of a generation, through a real and almost mystical connection with “the people,” seeking to meaningfully connect the country’s government with its average citizens. However, Newman claims that “once he was in office, something went terribly wrong. Elected as a spiritual leader at a time of growing national self-doubt, John Diefenbaker turned out to be not a spiritual leader at all, but a renegade in power – a renegade both to
his own cause and to the greater aspirations of the nation he was meant to be
governing.” What did Diefenbaker do to cause such disillusionment? According to
Newman, his faults were many: distrust of experienced civil servants, over-reliance on
“every gust of public opinion,” and chronic indecision. Eventually, his lack of a
coherent defence policy and dissention within his Cabinet brought “The Chief” down.
But, his personal deficiencies caused the problem. “By the time he had been forced into
the 1963 election, Diefenbaker’s indecision and mismanagement had been publicly
revealed by his inability to reach a sensible defence policy and by the disintegration of
his cabinet.” The Cuban missile crisis demonstrated how unproductive Diefenbaker’s
leadership had become, and highlighted the serious problems the nation faced.

Patrick Nicholson also highlights the foibles and deficiencies of Diefenbaker’s
cracter in his work on the Prime Minister, Vision and Indecision. Nicholson argues
that Diefenbaker’s time in office was characterized by the personality clash between
himself and Lester Pearson. The Cuban missile crisis was a watershed for Diefenbaker,
“beyond which his political fortunes were to flow sometimes sharply and sometimes
imperceptibly but always irrevocably downhill.” This was the moment, for Nicholson,
where Diefenbaker’s indecision rendered him no longer fit for leadership, since he was a
fence-sitter and tied the hands of those who would take decisive action. His indecision
during the missile crisis not only let down Canada’s allies, to whom Canada had been
bound to help defend with honor, but Canadians as well. Worst of all, when the
possibility of nuclear annihilation was strongest, on Saturday, 27 October, Diefenbaker

39 Ibid., p. xii.
40 Ibid., p. xiii.
41 Ibid., p. xv.
still refused to accept the warheads for the nuclear systems. “That Saturday night, October 27, was the peak, the dreaded moment when, in the expectation of the best-informed man in Canada, the transistor radios in Toronto schools would warn only empty classrooms, while the children would be bombed and burned in their nearby homes, unprotected by the Bomars and Voodos which Prime Minister Diefenbaker had kept headless, pointing immobile and unarmed at nuclear-loaded raiders.” 43 The invocation here of the idea of innocent childhood to argue for nuclear weapons is remarkable, even in Cold War rhetoric. 44 Through his indecision, Diefenbaker made it possible for these children to be bombed because he lacked the courage of his convictions to arm the necessary defensive systems.

These personality-driven analyses were the earliest studies of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada. They present a conflicting image of Diefenbaker’s time in office and his actions during the missile crisis. While they do contribute a valuable first-hand account (given that their authors lived through the crisis and knew personally many of the political leaders about whom they were writing), they nevertheless also have some flaws. The language used to describe Diefenbaker is so strong and passionate that one cannot help but wonder to what extent personal bias clouds objective assessment of the record. In addition, focusing so intently on the flaws of one man can obscure sharper analytical questions. If we assume that Diefenbaker was inherently an indecisive individual who lacked the ability to take a strong, clear position, then this could easily become a catch-all

43 Ibid., p. 171.
44 It is far more frequent for the symbol of an innocent child to be used in arguments against nuclear weapons. For a discussion of the manner in which the symbolic child is used in rhetoric, see Karen Dubinsky, Babies without Borders: Adoption and Migration Across the Americas (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2010).
explanation for every event during the missile crisis. Why did Canada not accept the nuclear weapons that the United States offered? Because Diefenbaker lacked the ability to make a decision when plagued by divided public opinion. Why did Canada remain engaged in trade with Cuba during the crisis? Because Diefenbaker did not wish to be forced into a decision. This line of reasoning obscures the larger picture. It prohibits other considerations and limits the field to a simplistic, narrow understanding of the Canadian political, military, and social situation in October 1962. There is a larger picture, and to place Diefenbaker at the center without considering the background or context is a narrow interpretation which this dissertation seeks to expand.

These early, personality-driven works, however, soon gave way to analyses which considered the larger picture. The first of these was written not long after the missile crisis by Robert Reford. In *Canada and Three Crises*, Reford examines the manner in which the Canadian government responded to the crisis around the Offshore Islands in the mid-1950s, the Suez canal crisis, and the Cuban missile crisis. He concludes that the way the Canadian government handled each of those crises was similar, even though they seemed different.  

During the crisis over the Offshore Islands, the Canadian government criticized American interference. During the Suez crisis, Canada was comparatively less critical of American policies, but External Affairs nevertheless sought an independent Canadian approach to the problem. By the time of the Cuban missile crisis, however, the response was one of initial delay, followed by eventual capitulation to what the United States wanted Canada to do.  

Reford finds that the unifying factor in these three different

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45 Robert Reford, *Canada and Three Crises* (Lindsay, ON: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1968).
46 Ibid., pp. vii-viii.
responses was that Canadian politicians tried to navigate the situation according to uniquely Canadian standards. These standards were: a desire to uphold national unity, to seek political liberty, to uphold the rule of law in international affairs, to be guided by the values of a Christian civilization, and finally to accept international responsibility.47

Unlike Newman and Nicholson, Reford downplays Diefenbaker’s indecision. He does not ignore it, but rather seeks explanations for it rather than dismissing Diefenbaker as inherently flawed. As a result, his work is a nuanced – especially since he did not have access to the full range of archival sources – look at the Cuban missile crisis, Minister of External Affairs Howard Green and Diefenbaker’s often nationalistic approach to policy formation, Canadian-American relations, Canadian-Cuban relations and the nuclear issue in Canada.

Peyton Lyon used the same general approach in his impressive study of Canada’s foreign affairs in the period between July 1961 and the Diefenbaker government’s electoral defeat in April 1963. Lyon also allows that Diefenbaker was not wholly to blame for much of what happened in this period, and that there was a great deal of context which is vital for a full understanding. Even though he discloses that he was disillusioned with the general trajectory of foreign affairs in this period, he nevertheless strives for objective assessments of the principle events and players. While he still considers facets of Diefenbaker’s personality important, he does so in a more considered manner. His discussion of Canada’s role in the Cuban missile crisis is tempered by his observation early in the work that Canada’s role in world affairs after 1957 was diminished. This had little to do with the transition from a Liberal to a Conservative

47 Ibid., p. 6.
government, but was a reflection of the changing world stage. Europe was recovering and relations between Britain and the United States were improving.\textsuperscript{48} Even though Canada’s actual power was diminishing, however, Canadians’ expectations of their international role continued to increase. The conflict between expectation and reality caused disillusionment. Lyon also considers factors which influenced Diefenbaker’s leadership style. For example, he considers the depression into which Diefenbaker fell as a result of an injured ankle and the death of a close friend a mitigating factor in his paranoia and inability to take decisive action.\textsuperscript{49} This understanding of Diefenbaker’s personality works with the analysis of the political situation. Lyon’s ability to examine both personality and politics makes his work a compelling and important contribution to the field.

The next works on Canada’s role in the Cuban missile crisis started to consider the event in the context of other themes and from new approaches. For example, Jocelyn Maynard Ghent has examined the crisis from the perspective of Canadian-American relations. In “Canada, the United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Ghent argues that Canada and the United States had different underlying perceptions and assumptions about Cuba which led to a spiral of misunderstanding during the missile crisis.\textsuperscript{50} Canada continued to trade with Cuba in the belief that trade with a country did not necessarily indicate approval of all its policies. The American emotional reaction against Cuba’s existence made little sense to Canadian officials. For their part, Americans could not understand why Canada, a country with such a similar structure, society and security

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{50} Jocelyn Maynard Ghent, “Canada, the United States, and the Cuban Missile Crisis,” \textit{Pacific Historical Review} 48, 2 (1979), p. 162.
concerns, could abide a communist presence in their hemisphere. In addition to these
differences of opinion, a number of other complicating factors led to tension between
Canada and the United States. Diefenbaker and Kennedy’s dislike for one another on a
personal level was a factor. Ghent also discusses Canada’s hesitation to raise the official
level of alert. She notes that it was only an unsatisfactory delay if Canada’s best interests
were served by rapid alignment with the United States. There were those, such as Green
and Diefenbaker, who believed this was not the case. Rather, they insisted that Canada’s
interests were better served by making no move which might provoke the Soviet Union.\footnote{Ibid., p. 172.}
This was a story of miscommunication, Ghent argues, within the Canadian government
and between Canada and the United States. Kennedy expected Canada to fall into line,
whereas Diefenbaker expected to be consulted about actions taken by the alliance.
Neither of these expectations were fulfilled, “and the resulting disappointments provoked
a further response accelerating the spiral of misunderstanding.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 183. The same author also wrote of the manner in which the Cuban missile crisis contributed to
Diefenbaker’s downfall. She examines to what extent the American state department interfered in
Canadian politics in early 1963, showing that a memo from Dean Rusk was the final factor in pushing
Diefenbaker out of office. See Jocelyn Maynard Ghent, “Did He Fall or Was He Pushed? The Kennedy
Administration and the Collapse of the Diefenbaker Government,” \textit{International History Review} 1, 2
(1979): 246-270. See also Jocelyn Ghent-Mallet and Don Munton, “Confronting Kennedy and the Missiles
(Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1992), pp. 78-100.}

In addition to these scholarly works, there were a number of memoirs published in
this period. Diefenbaker published his own reminiscences of his time in office in which
he stressed his fervent belief that he ought to have been consulted by Kennedy. His
memoir is predominantly concerned with defending his record, and expanding his
argument that Kennedy was wrong because he had acted without consulting the United
States’ allies. As he wrote, “when the crisis came in October 1962, it would have
required a considerable credulity to consider what notice we received of the impending United States action as either ‘talk’ or consultation.’” In response, Minister of Defence Douglas Harkness also published a memoir of his version of the events surrounding the missile crisis, the nuclear weapons controversy, his resignation, and the government’s defeat, which was published in various newspapers including the Calgary Herald and the Ottawa Citizen. These memoirs and their engagement with re-shaping public memory of the missile crisis will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

H. Basil Robinson, liaison between Diefenbaker and the Department of External Affairs, also wrote a history of Diefenbaker’s time in office. In Diefenbaker’s World, Robinson argues that it was essentially Diefenbaker’s understanding of himself as a prairie populist politician that determined how he handled foreign affairs. As Robinson puts it,

> His political priorities naturally influenced the process of decision-making in foreign affairs. The forces that would be influential in keeping his government in office, as he saw it, were basically domestic rather than international. When new situations arose in foreign affairs, his thoughts ran first to the tactics that should be used to handle them politically on the home front.

This explains his understanding of Cuban missile crisis. Robinson offers a compelling insight into Diefenbaker’s time in office, as well as the missile crisis. He explores the origins of Diefenbaker’s suggestion for a UN inspection team to be sent to Cuba within the context of this insight about Diefenbaker’s populism. This work is a significant

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56 Ibid., pp. 286-7.
contribution to understanding Canada’s role in the Cuban missile crisis. It moves past much of the rhetoric of earlier biographies, and presents an image of Diefenbaker tempered both by objective analysis and insider insight.

The next major work considering Canada’s role in the Cuban missile crisis was Knowlton Nash’s study of the relationship between Kennedy and Diefenbaker. This work, however, returns to the style that characterized the writing of Newman and Nicholson. It is a study of a clash of personalities. Kennedy, for example, was intelligent, stimulating, enriching, and vigorous. By contrast, Diefenbaker was steeped in the past, a dinosaur, and finicky. A reporter at the time of the missile crisis, Nash was familiar with backroom negotiations. He tells the story of the development of the feud between Kennedy and Diefenbaker, from the first state visit to the downfall of Diefenbaker’s government. During the missile crisis, Diefenbaker is portrayed as bitter and illogical. However, limitations of this work aside, Nash reminds us that an important factor in the Cuban missile crisis was human foible. He demonstrates the extent to which personal rivalry could affect high politics.

One of the most significant contributions to understanding Canada’s role in the Cuban missile crisis, however, is Peter Haydon’s work, The 1962 Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered. Haydon was also directly involved in the Cuban missile crisis, but not as a politician or reporter. During the missile crisis he was a Lieutenant in the Canadian Navy and thus offers insight into matters of chain of command, military structure, and strategic importance. His work explains some of the hitherto unclear issues regarding Canadian military involvement. The Canadian political

system failed to “exercise effective control of the Canadian military” in this international crisis.\textsuperscript{58} Haydon argues that Diefenbaker’s claim of not being properly consulted was based on a different understanding of continental defence than Kennedy’s. He also shows how involved the Canadian navy was in the hunt for Soviet submarines off the eastern seaboard. Despite Canada’s reputation as the only American ally that did not support Kennedy during the crisis, Canada was in fact the only country that actually provided military support. Overall, however, the political and military system failed to function properly during the crisis. “Although the Tory government’s defence policy…was a contributing factor, it was the mismanagement of civil-military relations during the autumn of 1962 that caused the greater part of the problem. In this, structural weaknesses compounded the human errors.”\textsuperscript{59}

Haydon’s work pointed the way for historians of the missile crisis in Canada to start asking \textit{why} things happened the way they did. Two final contributions to the field continue in this vein. In his work about the remarkable relationship between Pierre Trudeau and Fidel Castro, \textit{Three Nights In Havana}, Robert Wright discusses the Cuban missile crisis in context of developing his argument about Canadian-Cuban relations. Wright notes that whether continued relations between Canada and Cuba were a contrivance of the American State department or not, the policy had considerable support from the Canadian public.\textsuperscript{60} Diefenbaker understood this, and should not be condemned for his hesitation during the crisis, Wright argues. “The worst that can be said of the

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\textsuperscript{58} Peter T. Haydon, \textit{The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered} (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1993), p. 1.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp. 7-8.

prime minister is that he fumbled for two and a half days before reaching a position that would simultaneously represent Canada’s interests, the interests of the NATO alliance and, above all, the interests of world peace.”61 The Cuban missile crisis thus played an important role in the history of Canadian-Cuban relations. Seeing it in this light, and not simply in the context of Canadian-American relations, allows us to ask new questions about the role of both relationships in Canadian foreign policy.

The final and most recent contribution to the field is an article by Asa McKercher, entitled “A Half-hearted Response?: Canada and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962.” Traditionally, the Cuban missile crisis has been considered a low point in Canadian-American relations. However, McKercher argues that there was more support in Canada for the American position than has previously been recognized. He cites the actions at the lower levels of the Department of External Affairs as well as the Canadian navy to show that there was indeed cooperation between Canadian and American officials during the crisis.62 McKercher also reconsiders Howard Green’s television interview on Wednesday night, which is one of the most often-cited examples of Canadian belligerence. While previous scholars have claimed that Green was evading questions and refusing to voice support for the U.S., McKercher finds that Green did state full support for the Americans.63 This article is an important re-alignment of the field and

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61 Ibid., p. 83.
63 Ibid. pp. 342-343.
part of the continuing trend of recent works which are trying to revise Diefenbaker’s historical record.\textsuperscript{64}

While these works all provide essential political and military histories of the Cuban missile crisis, this study proposes that an important element has been missing. During the missile crisis, the world faced the very real possibility of imminent nuclear war. What is missing from previous examinations of the missile crisis is the human element. What were Canadians – other than Diefenbaker, Green and Harkness – thinking and doing during the crisis? What were they talking about? How did they understand the crisis and how did they understand their place within the crisis? They did not simply sit back and let it happen. Rather, many engaged with the idea through public discussion and debate. This is an essential part of the history of the crisis, and is what this study will contribute to the historiography.

\textbf{Cold War Studies and the Postwar Period: Canada in the 1950s and 1960s}

Thus far, I have discussed only the historiography surrounding the Cuban missile crisis itself from different perspectives. To truly understand the Canadian experience of the Cuban missile crisis, however, I must broaden the scope and look at the context in which the crisis took place. It is necessary to look at the individual threads of the “web of meanings.” This demonstrates where the gaps between the threads lie, and where the meaning of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada resides. In the years after the Second World War, Canada experienced significant political, social, and cultural changes. Some

\footnote{\textsuperscript{64} See, for example, Donald C. Storey and R. Bruce Shepard, eds., \textit{The Diefenbaker Legacy: Canadian Politics, Law and Society Since 1957} (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1998).}
were brought about by what are now thought of as Cold War forces, and others by post-
Second World War forces. Understanding how many Canadians saw themselves and the
country during the missile crisis requires an understanding of how postwar and Cold War
forces converged. What follows is a general discussion of the specific disciplines within
the larger field of Cold War studies which help provide a larger context, followed by a
more specific discussion of the Canadian Cold War.

To some extent, historians have always recognized that the Cold War was a global
event. The fact that the Soviet Union and the United States are on opposite sides of the
globe makes it true, even if there is no deeper understanding of the term “global” than
that. However, in recent years, and most intensely in the last decade or so, scholars have
begun to question the scope of the Cold War and the application of the term global to the
political, social and cultural developments of the (approximate) period 1946-1991.
Common to all these works is one theme in particular. Those who advocate use of the
conceptual framework of the global Cold War argue that scholars must begin to see past
the Soviet Union – United States binary. The Cold War had ramifications in all areas of
the world, including non-aligned, middle power, and Third World countries. The power
dynamic at play went in both directions, from superpower to lesser powers and vice
versa. Well-known political and diplomatic historians Melvin P. Leffler and David S.
Painter advocate an “international” approach in their study of the origins of the Cold
War. They argue that, while the two superpowers were obviously affected by the Cold

65 Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, eds., Origins of the Cold War: An International History (New
War, so too were most other nations around the globe in both foreign policy and domestic politics.66

Scholars of Latin American history Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser also advocate an approach which displaces emphasis from the superpowers. They argue that scholars need to examine how everyday life in Latin America was politicized and internationalized by the Cold War.67 Although they do not ignore the political and diplomatic history of the Soviet Union and United States, for Joseph and Spenser this is not the most important story. “At certain junctures...(most notably the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and the strategy of international armed struggle that it supported in the 1960s and 1970s, or the transnationalized anti-Communist crusade of the 1970s and 1980s), these struggles and the leftist and rightist ideologies that fueled them transcended national borders and powerfully influenced the relationship between the superpowers themselves.”68 The result, Joseph argues, was that “views of the shape that social citizenship would take” were created “at the national and grassroots levels.”69 This is what Cold War studies have been missing. Spenser and Joseph wish to create a sustained and serious dialogue between scholars of foreign relations and diplomacy and those who approach the study of the conflict from “the periphery, often ‘from below’ using the tools of area studies, social and cultural history, and cultural studies.”70 They correct the historical marginalization of, for example, women and lower classes. This

66 Ibid., p. 1.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid, emphasis added.
70 Ibid., p. 8.
work is an excellent volume which places the larger concerns of nations, foreign diplomacy, the international economy and policy into the context of cultural relations and the use of language and meaning in everyday life.\textsuperscript{71} I will draw from this approach, seeking the historical moment where everyday debate coincided with and shaped the actions of politicians.

Thus far, one of the most important works in the field of global Cold War history has been Odd Arne Westad’s \textit{The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times}. Westad tries to understand our world by looking at the history of the Cold War. Although he started out wanting to study the manner in which the relationships between the superpowers changed the Third World, Westad quickly found it difficult to do so without first examining the “transformation of Third World politics that precipitated the superpower involvement” in the first place.\textsuperscript{72} Westad argues that traditional understandings of the Third World during the Cold War automatically place its history in a framework which assumes the actions of the superpowers were central. However, Westad suggests that the Cold War happened analytically and conceptually in the south. First, simply put, the interventions of the United States and the Soviet Union shaped the frameworks, both international and domestic, within which cultural, political and social change took place in Third World countries. Second, and what Westad brings


to the historiography, is his argument that “Third World elites often framed their own political agendas in conscious response to the models of development presented by the two main contenders of the Cold War.” 73 The United States and the Soviet Union had to intervene in the Third World because of the internal logic of their rhetoric: “Locked in conflict over the very concept of European modernity – to which both states regarded themselves as successors – Washington and Moscow needed to change the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideologies, and the elites of the newly independent states proved fertile ground for their competition.” 74 This “new imperialism” required that the United States and Soviet Union intervene in the development of Third World nations to prove their superiority over each other. 75 Westad’s contribution thus recognizes the role of rhetoric, modernity and the political power of the Third World during the Cold War.

Race and gender were also significant factors in the formulation of (especially American) foreign policy during the Cold War. The postwar resurgence of Jim Crow laws in the American south and black Americans’ refusal to stand for segregation any longer fuelled the civil rights movement. The tragedy of Emmett Till’s death 76 is only one example of the manner in which a domestic, regional issue intertwined with Cold

73 Ibid., p. 3.
74 Ibid., p. 4.
75 Ibid., p. 5.
76 In August 1955 Emmett Till was murdered after allegedly flirting with a white woman in Mississippi. His murderers, Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were later acquitted by an all-white jury. The injustice of the case became a rallying point for the early civil rights movement. See, for a discussion of the role his mother, Mamie Bradley, and the NAACP played in the politicization of the case, Ruth Feldstein, “I Wanted the Whole World to See”: Race, Gender and Constructions of Motherhood in the Death of Emmett Till,” in Joanne Myerowitz, ed., Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), pp. 263-303.
War politics to have national and international repercussions. Penny M. von Eschen, for example, examines how race and Cold War politics worked for and against each other in her excellent work *Satchmo Blows Up the World.* She discusses the contradictions inherent in the American policies of sending black jazz musicians such as Louis Armstrong abroad to represent the advances of American culture while at home refusing to act decisively to enforce civil rights and dismantle Jim Crow laws in the south. Often while on tour, these musicians were treated better than they would have been at home. The musicians were keenly aware of the contradictions. Her work is path-breaking because she insists that this history of musicians is vital to the study of American foreign policy in this period. Whether examining how the voices of blacks worked to undermine American Cold War propaganda abroad, black American GIs in Germany, or the ironies of jazz musicians like Louis Armstrong as Cold War “ambassadors,” this entire body of literature, of which von Eschen is only one example, lends a richness to the complexity of the connection between domestic and global, race and foreign policy, postwar and Cold War.

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In recent years scholars have also begun to recognize the extent to which
gendered rhetoric influenced foreign and domestic Cold War policy.\textsuperscript{79} Scholars of the
Kennedy administration in particular have studied how notions of strength and weakness
were couched in terms of gender. To be powerful one had to be masculine, hard and
virile. Political or masculine weakness was tantamount to failure, to losing the Cold War
of rhetoric. K.A. Cuordileone has shown, in \textit{Manhood and American Political Culture in
the Cold War}, the manner in which politics worked through gendered notions of hard and
soft in an age of anxiety. Examining the red and lavender scares of the 1950s together,
the rhetoric and public images of well-known figures of the period such as Arthur
Schlesinger, Jr., Joseph McCarthy, Norman Mailer and – most relevant to this discussion
– John F. Kennedy, Cuordileone argues that “concerns about masculinity, sexuality, and
the self – widely articulated by experts, writers, and social critics – found their way into
politics and shaped political discourse and especially Cold War liberalism.”\textsuperscript{80}
Cuordileone skillfully points to the way in which the power of the New Frontier ideals,
which stressed “the spirit of courage, adventure, daring, and self-sacrifice” were
personified through the (masculine and powerful) figure of John F. Kennedy.\textsuperscript{81} This
gendered political rhetoric is useful in understanding Kennedy’s popularity at the time, as

\textsuperscript{79} See, for other excellent examples of the way gendered language worked during the Cold War, Suzanne
Clark, \textit{Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West} (Carbondale: Southern Illinois
University Press, 2000); Robert J. Corber, \textit{In the Name of National Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia, and
the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993); Michael
Davidson, \textit{Guys Like Us: Citing Masculinity in Cold War Poetics} (Chicago and London: University of
Chicago Press, 2004); Robert D. Dean, \textit{Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War
Foreign Policy} (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert,
eds., \textit{Rethinking Cold War Culture} (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); Elaine Tyler May,
\textit{Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era} (New York: Basic Books, 1988); and Joanne
Myerowitz, ed., \textit{Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960} (Philadelphia:
\textsuperscript{80} K.A. Cuordileone, \textit{Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War} (New York and London:
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., pp. 168-9.
well as the manner in which he was contrasted with Diefenbaker during the missile crisis. Kennedy became associated with strong leadership, strength of will, bravado and the successful negotiation of the crisis. Diefenbaker, on the other hand, spent a few days consulting with his Cabinet and attempted to involve the United Nations through inspections or even peacekeeping. For this he became the antithesis of Kennedy, and thus soft, weak and dithering. This contrast resurfaced a number of times in public discussion during the crisis.

**Canada’s Cold War**

While the McCarthy-led red scare and House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) tore a swath through American society in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Canada experienced a red scare of its own, which though less public, was no less devastating to those whose livelihoods, and in some cases lives, it took. The creation of what Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse have called the national insecurity state began with the defection of Igor Gouzenko, Soviet clerk and spy, to the RCMP. Gouzenko’s defection was followed by a civil service purge of potential spies, or those had a personal history that was thought to make them vulnerable to blackmail. The resulting red and lavender scare, the systemic firing or demotion of anyone suspected of communism or

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82 Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, _Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957_ (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). Igor Gouzenko was a cipher clerk in the Soviet embassy in Ottawa. In 1945 he defected to the RCMP rather than go home. The documents he showed the Canadian authorities led to a massive investigation and revealed a spy ring at work in North America. The “Gouzenko Affair” as it has become known, is often thought to be one of the triggering events of the Cold War. For more information on Gouzenko and his defection, see, J.L. Black and Martin Rudner, eds. _The Gouzenko Affair: Canada and the Beginnings of Cold War Counter-Espionage_ (Manotick: Penumbra Press, 2006); J. L. Granatstein and David Stafford, _Spy Wars: Espionage and Canada From Gouzenko to Glasnost_ (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1990); and Amy Knight, _How the Cold War Began: The Gouzenko Affair and the Hunt for Soviet Spies_ (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart, 2005).
“subversive” behaviour, lasted for years. This darker side of the Cold War in both Canada and the United States has had long-lasting repercussions.

Canada’s Cold War experience was also marked by the creation of an intricate alliance system and increasing military, political and cultural connections with the United States. In the postwar, or early Cold War period, Canadian foreign policy was characterized by looser ties with Britain and stronger ties with the United States. But at the same time, it was not a simple equation in which looser ties with Britain necessitated closer ties with the United States. As Robert Teigrob has shown, it was a more complex process. In the immediate post–Second World War period, Canadians increasingly subscribed to the necessity of American Cold War policies. In his work *Warming up to the Cold War: Canada and the United States’ Coalition of the Willing, From Hiroshima to Korea*, Teigrob shows how American cultural expansion throughout Canada helped create approval of and support for American Cold War initiatives like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Korean War.

Tiegrob explores “the ways in which ‘nation’ interacted with other markers of identity as citizens from both countries

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84 Robert Teigrob, *Warming Up to the Cold War: Canada and the United States’ Coalition of the Willing, from Hiroshima to Korea* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
negotiated their responses to the emerging world order.” In other words, between 1945-1950, Canada subscribed to the consensus for an American-led Cold War. Canadian nationalism was subsumed under this consensus, and support for Cold War initiatives like hunting down spies and NATO became widespread. This lasted until after the Korean War, when a resurgence in Canadian nationalism and distaste for American hegemony asserted itself. This argument points to the degree to which Cold War considerations determined Canadian postwar policy.

Canada’s political, diplomatic, and cultural relationship with the United States thus grew stronger in the early Cold War period, but the strengthening of this relationship was not uncontested. Canada’s reaction to the Korean War was an example of the resurgence of some Canadian misgivings about the growth of American power and influence. As J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer have shown, Canada’s geographical proximity to the United States, combined with increasing cultural and economic ties, resulted in concern about the extent to which the United States should be allowed to determine Canadian policy. During the Korean war, Pearson (then Minister of External Affairs) strove to negotiate the shifting terrain between American expectations and Canadian interests. As Granatstein and Hillmer put it, “Pearson…was certainly aware of the disadvantages that might result, but keeping the Korean War limited and bringing it to an end as soon as possible were important enough to run the risk of American anger.”

85 Ibid., p. 4.
86 Ibid., p. 17.
Therefore, the growing sense that Canadian policy needed to be independent from American policy began well before Diefenbaker entered office.\textsuperscript{88}

Although many Canadians were uneasy about the extent of American influence, Canadian-American interests were similar. As Norman Hillmer notes, “Canada and the United States are unequal partners, but partners nevertheless – whether they like it or not.”\textsuperscript{89} This political and cultural relationship was negotiated with pragmatic realization of security concerns and economic links. It was not without problems, however. During the Suez crisis, for example, Canada found itself torn between its two closest allies: the United States and Britain. Granatstein and Hillmer, as well as Robert Bothwell, have argued that incidents such as Herbert Norman’s suicide in April 1957 placed even more tension on the relationship.\textsuperscript{90} Norman was Canada’s Ambassador to Egypt but was investigated by the American authorities for his connections to communism. Rather than face the fallout of the controversy, he committed suicide. Many Canadian officials believed that he was unnecessarily hounded, and his death resulted in a degree of tension in Canadian-American relations.\textsuperscript{91}

When Diefenbaker became Prime Minister, therefore, his nationalism and distaste for American incursion spoke to a Canadian public already primed for his arguments. While Canada negotiated its way through the difficulties that its relationship with the United States presented, the country was also attempting to come to terms with a changing relationship with the British empire. José E. Igartua has shown that this was

\textsuperscript{90} Granatstein and Hillmer, \textit{For Better or For Worse}, pp. 188-9; Bothwell, \textit{Canada and the United States}, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{91} Granatstein and Hillmer, \textit{For Better or For Worse}, p. 189.
period in which Canada shed its identity as a British Commonwealth nation. Symbols of the British empire were rapidly altered to reflect a uniquely Canadian outlook. A simple but meaningful example was increased emphasis on the word “Canada” rather than “Dominion” in public discourse. The 1956 Suez crisis helped this process along, since it “forced the Canadian government out of its self-satisfied definition of a bridge between the two great English-speaking countries.”92 Philip Buckner has also documented this shift with his work Canada and the End of Empire. In the introduction to this collection, he argues that the end of empire in Canada has not received enough attention from scholars.93 Too often, the relationship is assumed to have been one of mutual antagonism, characterized by Britain hindering Canada’s growth as an independent nation. Buckner, however, asserts that Canadians were capable of being both Canadian and British.94

It is clear that Canada’s foreign policy in this period is not a simple story of one preferred monolith over the other. There was constant negotiation and re-negotiation of the terms of these relationships. Perhaps the reason why Canadian identity is still difficult to define is due to this constant negotiation. Out of these shifting allegiances grew the Canadian desire for multilateral initiatives and an independent middle power status. Tom Keating has shown this trend in his foundational work, Canada and World Order: The Multilateralist Tradition in Canadian Foreign Policy. Keating argues that

93 Philip Buckner, ed., Canada and the End of Empire (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2005). An exception to this argument is J.L. Granatstein and Norman Hillmer’s Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), but this work is a survey of Canada’s entire history, and Buckner is specifically calling for works on the postwar period.
94 Ibid., p. 3. See also Norman Hillmer and J.L. Granatstein, Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1994).
“multilateral contacts have generally taken precedence over bilateral ones and multilateral diplomacy has been the preferred instrument for the pursuit of foreign policy objectives.”

This policy has traditionally cut across party lines at the same time that it has found wide public support. Through an examination of Canadian policymakers’ participation in various global organizations, such as the formation of the Bretton Woods system, the United Nations and NATO, Keating shows how Canadian policy makers have repeatedly espoused a multilateral policy and that, through the postwar period, it became intrinsic to national identity. “In short,” he argues, “multilateralism became a device for protecting the wide-ranging interests of a middle power, especially one sharing a continent with a superpower.”

Though this book confines the exploration of this concept solely to the realm of policymakers and politicians, it nonetheless lays important groundwork. Even though Adam Chapnick has debunked the myth that Canadians played a significant role in the founding of the United Nations, the fact that we cling to it as a national myth reveals the significance of this middle power status to popular understandings of Canadian identity.

This exploration of the history of Canadian foreign policy helps explain the political and social situation in October 1962. It was a period when both national identity and foreign relations were in flux. Diefenbaker was an excellent example of those who wished for traditional ties to the British Commonwealth to remain the defining feature of the Canadian social landscape. Others, such as Pearson, saw great potential in the

96 Ibid., p. 11.
American relationship. They were aware of the stark realities of continental defence, and saw in their neighbour a force they could not ignore. The Cuban missile crisis for Canada, therefore, was a crisis in national identity, in foreign relations and in the future shape of the nation. To look at these works in the context of both postwar and Cold War literature is to gain a better understanding of the complexity and nuance of foreign policy in this period.

Postwar and Cold War Culture and Society

While the “national insecurity state” developed and Canada’s armed forces joined alliance systems and committed to overseas wars, the Cold War had ramifications in Canadian culture and society as well. Franca Iacovetta has demonstrated that the Canadian state perceived immigrants, especially men, and especially those from behind the Iron Curtain, as potentially dangerous or deviant. The insecurity state and anti-communism had an effect on many parts of society, including the make-up of Toronto’s Board of Education (and likely those in other Canadian cities as well), as has been shown by Frank K. Clarke. Civil defence initiatives were also evident in Canadian schools, although not as pervasively as in United States, and in a more haphazard manner.

98 Whitaker and Marcuse, Cold War Canada, for the phrase “national insecurity state.”
Richard Cavell’s edited volume *Love, Hate and Fear in Canada’s Cold War* provides an excellent discussion of the effect of the Cold War on Canadian society, such as the role that the National Film Board and the popular women’s magazine *Chatelaine* had in both reinforcing and questioning Cold War forces.\(^{102}\) Reg Whitaker and Steve Hewitt also look, decade by decade, at key moments in the Canadian Cold War and why they matter, such as the Korean war, the Diefenbunker, NORAD, the birth of peacekeeping, the Munsinger affair, and Vietnam draft-dodgers.\(^{103}\)

The Cold War is obviously an important part of the context of the missile crisis. However, this study argues that the meaning of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada is found in the intersections between postwar and Cold War forces. Therefore, bringing together “postwar” and “Cold War” historiographies is useful. What, exactly, is the difference between the two terms? After all, they are roughly the same time period. The Cold War lasted longer than the postwar period, until about 1989-1991. The postwar period lasted only into the 1950s and came to an end with the beginning of the 1960s. However, many academics treat the two concepts as conceptually distinct, and the historiographies that inform them tend to be mutually exclusive.

Following the Second World War, Canadians were concerned with returning to “normal.” This was especially true with respect to the largest and growing segment of the population, children and teenagers. After the difficult years of the Great Depression and the turmoil of the Second World War, Canadians wanted to reassert traditional gender roles.

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102 See especially the articles by Valerie Korinek and Tomas Waugh, as well as the other excellent contributions in Richard Cavell, ed., *Love, Hate and Fear in Canada’s Cold War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

and family roles, and plan for a secure economic future. As Mary Louise Adams discusses in her work *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality*, youth were a prime focus of social discourse in the postwar period, particularly centering around the construction of heterosexuality. Through an examination of what was thought to be normal, or mainstream, Adams examines how the margins of sexuality were created and the role of young people in sustaining a “healthy” nation. Other authors have also discussed how and why young people in the postwar period were important and why Canadian society was concerned with their well-being and potential delinquency. In *Born At the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, Doug Owram notes there were three unique factors at play in the postwar period that made the baby boom generation so important: their demographic size, the period of postwar affluence into which they were born, and their connection to “the fabled decade of the 1960s.” Although Owram looks at the creation of a youth culture for this generation, rather than at discourses concerning “proper” behaviour, both he and Adams draw on a historiography which concerns itself with a current in Canadian social history that has a great deal to do with the Cold War. Concerns over youth were often the forum for expression of anxiety about many other realities of Cold War life. These concerns and discussions were part of the context in which the Cold War affected everyday life. When students at universities protested during the crisis with “childish”

\[\text{\textsuperscript{104}}\text{Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{105}}\text{See also Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) and Magda Fahrni, *Household Politics: Montreal Families and Postwar Reconstruction* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005) for a further discussion of the concern with the concept of “normal” in the postwar period, and the discussion of family and gender roles.}\]
antics, we can see these concerns take concrete form in the public censure they received in various newspapers.

Postwar Canadian historians have also been interested in culture. Whether they are interested in political culture, aspects of consumer culture, interaction between American and Canadian culture, or just in a general survey of Canadian culture, Canadian scholars have analyzed different facets of the development of a national culture in the postwar period. However, rarely is postwar cultural history discussed within the context of the global Cold War. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau discuss the concept of citizenship and the new connotations with which it became associated in the postwar period in their edited collection, *Cultures of Citizenship in Postwar Canada, 1940-1955*.107 Similarly, Paul Litt discusses this notion of culture from the top by examining the historical evolution and ramifications of the Massey Commission in his work, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission*. Noting that the commission was given a certain mandate, then overstepped said mandate in its “crusade for Canadian cultural nationalism,” Litt shows how the commissioners believed the greatest threat to Canadian cultural development was American incursion.108 He makes this argument without looking at why American culture was so easily diffused across the border and without examining the Cold War context of why the Americans wanted their cultural products spread throughout the globe. Although it is one of the only monograph-length works on the history of this commission, Litt’s book is missing some key elements. Instead of

exploring the Cold War dimensions of Canadian cultural nationalism, Litt limits his story to an organizational history of the commission and biography of the commissioners.

As we have seen with the discussion regarding the Canadian-American political relationship, the reality of an American presence in Canadian life was inescapable. This did not mean that it was uncontested, but it was constantly present. Works such as David H. Flaherty and Frank E. Manning’s *The Beaver Bites Back? American Popular Culture in Canada*, and Paul Rutherford’s *Primetime Canada: When Television Was Young, 1952-1967* look at this reality. Flaherty and Manning examine various facets of American culture that were transported into Canada, as well as the process by which Canadians absorbed and sometimes altered the meaning of these cultural products. Rutherford examines the development of television networks in Canada and shows the extent to which American programming took over Canadian television sets, for reasons of proximity, economy and popularity. Indeed, this inundation is one of the reasons why Canadians were able to follow the missile crisis so closely; for most, watching Kennedy’s speech was the first they heard of the crisis. It is important, then, to understand the extent to which Canadians were aware of and immersed in American culture.

The postwar period then gave way to the 1960s. The tranquil 1950s became a thing of the past, and the complacency and tranquility of that era gave way to upheaval,

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protest, social and political revolution.\textsuperscript{110} Myrna Kostash argues that “the ‘facts of life’ in Canada (the presences of Quebec, the NDP and the multinational) mean that to know about Berkeley and Chicago and Columbia, about Panthers and Vietnam veterans and rock ‘n’ roll stars, is not to know everything.”\textsuperscript{111} What she seeks to discover in her work is “where they touch and where they veer off from each other.”\textsuperscript{112} Furthermore, Kostash discusses the bomb, the impact of the ban-the-bomb movement on society, and the fear that the Cold War entailed. Of the Cuban missile crisis in particular, she writes:

Catatonic, North America, and the Canadian peace movement with it, watched the inexorable drift of missile-cargoed Soviet ships towards the American naval blockade in the Caribbean Sea. This was it, then, the end of the world. We were all going to die: the young and the peaceful and the ethical included, under a hail of nuclear hardware. The demonstrations and the resistance, the efforts to force an independent foreign policy, the appeals to the ultimately common interest of human kind, were as chimera compared to this very palpable scenario of a showdown between the super-imperial powers of East and West.\textsuperscript{113}

Kostash demonstrates in this passage how the antinuclear movement and protests were an integral part of the missile crisis, even if the role they played was horrified observer.

More recently, scholars have begun to study this era in Canada from other perspectives. Stuart Henderson, for example, examines the notion of performativity and identity in the Yorkville district in his work \textit{Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s}.\textsuperscript{114} He explores how Yorkville, became the hip area of the city where youth would go to interact with a counterculture and to “make the scene.” By doing so, notions

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110} There is a massive amount of research on the decade of the 1960s, far more than can be cited here. For an excellent anthology of contributions from scholars studying various different topics and geographical areas, see Karen Dubinsky, et al., eds., \textit{New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness} (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009).
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Myrna Kostash, \textit{A Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada} (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1980), p. xii.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p. xxiv.
  \item \textsuperscript{114} Stuart Henderson, \textit{Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).
\end{itemize}
of identity and self were constantly made and remade.\textsuperscript{115} Similarly, Sean Mills examines another major Canadian city, a different “scene” of the 1960s, from a different angle. Mills examines how Montreal in the 1960s was characterized by activists and political movements which utilized and drew from the concept of decolonization to connect to a transnational movement.\textsuperscript{116} Scott Rutherford has examined how Aboriginal protest movements in the 1960s worked through discourses of decolonization in the global 1960s.\textsuperscript{117} These three examples demonstrate some of the complexity of the social landscape of the 1960s.

The Cuban missile crisis, therefore, happened at a time in Canada when the 1960s were just beginning to explode, when people could no longer reconcile a leader such as Diefenbaker with the world in which they lived. The Cuban missile crisis occurred within the context of these much larger societal forces. The Canadian political system was in the midst of a shift from postwar tranquility to 1960s resistance and protest. It was marked by Cold War secrecy and paranoia, but also by the debate over nuclear weapons. Cuba was an enormously potent symbol, and was complicated by the romanticism associated with Fidel Castro and his barbudos, and by the parallel yet conflicting idolization of President Kennedy, his beautiful young wife and his seemingly energetic administration. By contrast, Canada’s own Prime Minister Diefenbaker seemed much older, much slower, much less decisive. How could Canada play an international role as the middle power that many believed it was destined to be, with such a leader at

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 15.
\textsuperscript{116} Sean Mills, The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{117} Scott Rutherford, “Canada’s Other Red Scare: Rights, Decolonization, and Indigenous Political Protest in the Global Sixties,” (PhD diss., Queen’s University, 2011).
the helm? Did not Lester Pearson, with his shiny new Nobel Peace Prize and his international reputation, better represent the future of Canada? And yet, Diefenbaker represented the little guy in Parliament, the everyday Joe who would not otherwise have been heard by the power-brokers in Ottawa. He was, at his core, an anti-Communist Cold Warrior, and if nothing else, Diefenbaker could be counted upon to protect Canada from the “commies.” While the economy suffered under Diefenbaker’s leadership, most Canadians were more wealthy than they had ever been and were able to own cars and homes and buy everything their kids not only needed but wanted. The atomic bomb was an ever-present threat, but aside from the occasional crisis far away around the Suez Canal or Berlin, it was not at the forefront of the average Canadian’s day-to-day consciousness.

Until October 1962, that is, when these postwar and Cold War forces, this remarkable moment between the 1950s and 1960s, converged. As the events which would form the Cuban missile crisis began to take shape, forces greater than merely the actions of Castro, Kennedy and Khrushchev were weaving a web in which Canadians would form their impressions and discussions of that event. The Cuban missile crisis would come to represent, for Canada, much more than simply the missiles in Cuba. It would become a test of national identity, of the value of their alliances, of the mettle of their leaders, and of where they wanted their country to go in the future.

**Sources, Methodology and Organization**

Attempting to discover what English Canadians thought of the Cuban missile crisis, how they understood it, and how they remember it is surprisingly complicated.
This is not because there are few people who remember it, but rather because there are too many. How does one discover the “national” experience of a crisis in a nation so large, diverse and scattered? In order to create a practical and feasible approach, this study predominantly examines print sources. Archives and newspapers form the bulk of the sources used. Although limiting the survey of sources to print sources eliminates television and radio, for example, from the discussion, this analysis nevertheless allows a more in-depth examination of the nuances and contours of the debate that happened during and in the immediate aftermath of the missile crisis in Canada. This choice was made in order to facilitate a more in-depth survey of one kind of source base. As a result, this dissertation is an examination of the mainstream story, and is a commentary not just on what was said, but also on how events are reported in Canadian society. It is a commentary on an examination of what historian Ian McKay has termed Canada’s “liberal order framework.”

Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s records are a significant archival source for this dissertation. The records from his time in office contain hundreds upon hundreds of letters from citizens to the Prime Minister on a variety of issues, all neatly filed according to subject, with those that the Prime Minister himself actually read neatly stamped. These are a rich resource for the historian, especially since this particular Prime Minister is well-known for his reliance on letters from Canadians. While these letters may not be representative of the Canadian population, they provide an excellent qualitative survey

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119 Diefenbaker thought of himself as a populist and his connection to the people he governed was maintained at least in part through his dedication to reading the letters sent to him. See Newman, Renegade in Power, p. 86; Patricia J. McMahon, Essence of Indecision: Diefenbaker’s Nuclear Policy, 1957-1963 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), pp. 175-176.
of the content and nuance of debate surrounding the missile crisis, Castro and communism, nuclear weapons and Canadian peacekeeping initiatives. This archival collection also contains diplomatic memos and communiqués which provide insight into Cabinet meetings, debates between ministers and Prime Ministerial speeches, although the emphasis is placed on the range of Canadian reactions during the Cuban missile crisis (and therefore letters from citizens), rather than the records of the politicians and their actions during the crisis. It is for this reason that, for example, Lester B. Pearson’s records were not examined in depth. Other archival collections used in this study include the Emergency Preparedness Canada fonds (on civil defence initiatives), the records of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, the records of H. Basil Robinson, and the records of the Voice of Women, an activist and anti-nuclear weapons group.

Newspapers are the other major source for this project. In order to attempt to understand how different parts of the country reacted, I have conducted a survey of thirteen major daily newspapers from the largest cities which were home to the bulk of Canada’s English-speaking population. These thirteen newspapers were chosen in the attempt to include the western and maritime provinces in a meaningful way, to sample at least one (and in some cases two) different newspaper reactions within a given province, and to look at what the largest daily newspapers chose to report about the missile crisis in Canada. Each of these major newspapers were examined for the period during the missile crisis, which included the public phase of the crisis and its aftermath, through to the end of November (22 October – 30 November). In cities where vibrant discussion warranted it, I continued into December, until discussion of the missile crisis faded from the record. In order to understand how discussion of the crisis and memory changed over
the years since (most relevant for chapter six of this study), I have looked at anniversaries of the crisis, every year for the first five years, then in five year increments (fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and so on) to determine what types of retrospective pieces were published, by whom, and what aspects of the crisis in Canada were highlighted, and which were downplayed. Excerpts from these newspapers include wire stories (although American wire stories were generally avoided, and when used, I have made special notation of the source), opinion/editorials, letters to the editor, and specials. In all, they represent an interesting picture of the diversity of the Canadian reaction to the missile crisis, and paint a nuanced view of the debate.

In addition to archival and newspaper sources, I have also drawn on cultural sources and oral interviews. Cultural sources, which include television specials, films, novels, and museum displays, are also most relevant in the last chapter which examines the memory of the crisis and how it has been integrated into the history of the country. They are also the exception to the general rule of examining only print sources. This was done in the attempt to provide a more holistic examination of how memory of the crisis has been formed. These sources show which aspects of the crisis are remembered and which are not. Fear of nuclear war is a constant theme. These sources show how the memory of the crisis has become associated with the leaders of the crisis.

Oral interviews proved a complicated source as well. I found that most people over the age of fifty or so have some memory of the crisis, and since there are a great many people in Canada who fit that description, I had no idea where to begin. Practical considerations made a thorough national oral history sample impossible. However, oral interviews were conducted in Calgary, Saskatchewan, Ottawa, Carp (Ontario), and
Kingston, with people from various parts of the country, and indeed even with individuals who were not in Canada at the time. I attempted to recruit participants by sending a poster asking for memories of the crisis to local churches, supermarkets, legion halls, retirement homes, and libraries. Those who did respond had valuable and in many cases extremely vivid memories of their experiences during the crisis, and although these individuals do not represent an exact sample of Canada’s reaction to the missile crisis, their experiences nevertheless provide invaluable texture and detail to the themes and arguments which emerge from the print sources. Rather than not use their stories simply because I did not have enough of them, I believe it is more important to include them as examples which further demonstrate the themes which the print sources already presented. These interviews thus offer a richness of personal experience, a reminder of the fear, and an emphasis of the shared nature of the crisis that is extremely valuable.

Chapter two examines the historical events of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada. This chapter establishes a narrative, day-by-day accounting of the crisis. While the well-known story of the events between the Soviet Union and the United States are referenced and used as signposts, the focus here is on Canada. This chapter unites the story of what Diefenbaker, Howard Green (Minister of External Affairs), Douglas Harkness (Minister of Defence), and the Cabinet were doing during the crisis with what citizens across the country were doing. It lays the groundwork for the following analysis by explaining Diefenbaker’s actions during the crisis which would become so controversial. In addition, some historical background and context is explained, such as Canada’s role in the Suez

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120 One interviewee was a student in the United States, and another an officer of the air force on exchange with the American military, and was flying missions over the quarantine area during the crisis.
Crisis of 1956, which became an important factor during the crisis as Diefenbaker squared off with Lester B. Pearson, then Leader of the Official Opposition.

Chapter three examines the relationship between Canada and Cuba and how the crisis threw the problems and complexities of that relationship into sharp relief. Exploring how many Canadians saw this relationship and how Cuba and Cubans were imagined, this chapter argues that key issues demonstrate the range of opinion within the country. Castro was, in many ways, a popular public figure before the crisis, and this image of him was created and re-created throughout the crisis and in its aftermath in a variety of ways which demonstrate a great deal about the way he was understood in Canada. Discussion about trade with Cuba and Canadian membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) also demonstrate the degree to which Canadian opinion was split. Finally, the role of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in Canada is examined as one of the most obvious and vocal champions of Canada’s relationship with Cuba.

Chapter four looks at the manner in which some Canadians understood their relationship with the United States to be affected and symbolized by the crisis. While some congratulated Diefenbaker for standing up to the Americans and taking time to explore and understand the situation, others pilloried him for indecision and dithering. Whether it was misplaced nationalism or sincere and thoughtful deliberation, the Cuban missile crisis embodied key aspects of the Canadian-American relationship. Three key issues formed the basis of this public discussion: American pressure on Canadian-Cuban relations, Canadian acquisition of nuclear warheads for their weapons systems, and the fact that Canada was not consulted before a decision was made on the Cuban quarantine,
as it should have been according to various collective security agreements under NATO and NORAD.

Chapter five explores how ideas about Canada’s relationships with Cuba and the United States intersected through the idea of Canada as a peaceful and peacekeeping nation. This chapter shows that while the Canadian-Cuban relationship and the Canadian-American relationship were much debated and often at odds with each other, the one thing that many Canadians could agree upon was that Canada could have a role in the successful resolution of the crisis. That is, whether Canada stood up for the little guy, as it were, for smaller nations that were dominated by behemoths like the United States, or whether Canada fulfilled its defence commitments and fully backed the United States position, the end was the same: Canada could and should have a role on the global stage in the successful resolution of the crisis. The idea of Canada as a peaceable middle power was a key component of this idea. Whether or not Canada actually could have exerted influence over the manner in which the crisis was resolved, I argue that many thought that it should. The gap between myth and reality is an important factor in this history.

Finally, chapter six explores how the missile crisis has been remembered in Canadian culture. This chapter explores how versions of the missile crisis highlight key themes and forget others, only to revise this and bring back forgotten issues depending on the contemporary milieu. Even though the focus of this study is to re-orient the history of the Cuban missile crisis away from the great leader approach and focus on everyday Canadians, this chapter nevertheless organizes the memory of the crisis around Kennedy, Castro and Diefenbaker. This is done for a variety of reasons. First, because it is a useful
organizational tool which shows how opinions and memories, even of one individual, change over time. Second, and perhaps more pragmatically, because many Canadians have come to associate the missile crisis, in their retellings of the event, around these three individuals. Fear of nuclear war is also a constant theme in memories of the crisis.

About halfway through the research stage of this study, I presented some of my initial findings on the crisis at a conference. Although the presentation went well, I was given an effective reminder of what this is all about by an individual who approached me after the session ended. She said that she clearly remembered the missile crisis, and that while I had some good points about the larger context and issues at play in Canadian society at the time, I needed to remember one thing. It was terrifying. The fear of complete and utter annihilation by nuclear bombs was a real threat, and she remembered that most of all. Others I have interviewed for this study also remember the pervasive anxiety, the worry that this was the moment when atomic bombs, which had only been used twice and which, on any other day, were still a threat but in a vague and undefined way, came to the center of human consciousness and threatened day to day existence.

Whether or not the world actually was that close to nuclear annihilation in October 1962, many believed it could happen, the bomb could drop, and that would be it. As I turn to the larger themes and issues at play in Canadian society, it is worth remembering the fear and anxiety that tinged the edges of everyday life in Canada during the missile crisis of October 1962.
Chapter Two – The Cuban Missile Crisis in Canada

In the autumn of 1962, Mark was home in Saskatchewan on leave. The year before, he saw an advertisement in the local paper for a program to join the military and finish high school at the same time. He wanted to see more of the country, so he joined the troop train in Regina and headed east over the prairies, through Winnipeg and onwards to Kingston. It was the first time he had been away from home for a significant period of time, and he was excited to see through the train windows the country that he had studied in his Social Studies classroom. He jokingly remembers seeing the large ships at Port Arthur, since the biggest boat he had ever seen before was a row boat.

Attending classes in the morning and basic training in the afternoon, he spent a few years in Kingston before graduating. He then went home on leave in September 1962, with plans to return and attend the Royal Military College of Canada. Abruptly, his leave was cut short as he was ordered to return to the base in Kingston. He’d seen in the newspapers and heard on the radio that there was a situation between Kennedy and Khrushchev over missiles in Cuba, so he was able to guess why he had to go back. Upon his return, the mood on base was one of apprehensive anticipation. His peers, many of whom were also eighteen, nineteen, or twenty years old, were excited. Mr. Diefenbaker would surely order the alert and maybe they would be deployed somewhere. Though he remembered that there was never an official order of alert, they were unofficially on standby. The general mood was “excitement, and apprehension…I can’t say personally
that I was fearful, I was kinda looking forward to it, really. But I imagine that in some of the guys minds there was an element of fear.”

Another individual remembers that the crisis was terrifying. The Suez Canal crisis of 1956 and the Cuban missile crisis were the two Cold War events that were most memorable for David. During the Suez crisis he remembers sitting with his friends on the bank of the Red River in Winnipeg, “bemoaning the fact [that] we were going to be blown to hell and we hadn’t even been laid yet.” Years later, during the Cuban missile crisis, he was more afraid of dying a horrible death of radiation poisoning. By this time, he was in his early twenties and living in Vancouver. He did not want to die from radiation poisoning, so he went to a pharmacist and bought enough aspirin powder to kill two adults, telling the pharmacist that they were doing experiments at school on growing crystals. He split the powder into two, giving half to his girlfriend. If a nuclear war broke out, they would take the powder and end it before having to die a much more painful death. “I carried that stuff around with me at all times,” he remembered. “Needless to say, I didn’t have to use it, but it was a comfort to know that I could just drink it, pass out, and die without the slow lingering death from radiation.”

He was certain that the Russians would never back down, and believes that the rest of the world was just as astonished as he was when the Russians did turn their ships around and agreed to dismantle the missile bases in Cuba. He couldn’t believe the crisis was over, and carried “that damn pack of ‘poison’” with him for at least another five years.

1 Mark, interviewed by author, Calgary, Alberta, 16 July 2010.
2 Name changed for anonymity.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
Sheila, living in Ottawa at the time, remembers that during the Cuban missile crisis she was living with her mother who was sick and needed live-in help. She remembers feeling utterly helpless. She sat on the steps of the kitchen in her apartment, where she could see in the skyline the outline of the Parliament buildings, and thought “if the bomb drops, or if the plane comes, at least I’ll see it.”\(^6\) Even though she followed the news and was politically aware, she remembers thinking that all she could do was sit there. She had an aunt in Nova Scotia who had stocked emergency supplies and created a plan for neighbourhood kids to get to their homes. Yet Sheila was aware that living on the eighth floor of an apartment building so close to the heart of the government, there was very little that she could do by way of preparation. Even then, if Ottawa was hit, there was little chance of surviving because it would all be evaporated anyways.

Another Canadian had a different experience during the Cuban missile crisis. Brian was a “radician” (which is the short-hand name for radio technician) working on the Distant Early Warning (DEW) line, the string of bases in Canada’s north that would be the first to send up an alarm in case an attack came from Russia over the north pole. As a nineteen year old, he arrived at Hall Beach to work on the DEW line. He remembers that life up there was, in a word, boring. Mail and movies would arrive once a week, if they were lucky, but if the weather was bad, they got nothing. While he was a bit of a loner, and didn’t mind the quiet much, life was hard, and suicides weren’t unheard of. While working, he remembers that he spent four hours watching the radar monitors and four hours doing maintenance work. The communications gear was kept separate from the rest of the station, and the radicians had more contact with the outside

\(^6\) Sheila, interviewed by author, Ottawa, Ontario, 6 June 2010.
world through their conversations with the pilots and crew of the American B-52s that would fly up over the base on their way to patrol the north. He and other radicians like him were responsible for transmitting the go or no-go message. He remembers novels and movies such as *Fail-Safe*; the plot usually involved a box that gave the Americans the go or no-go message which usually failed somehow and nuclear disaster struck. In reality, however, “there was no box. It was me sitting on the ground, me and a lot of other people like me, transmitting the go no-go message.”

The first indication of a crisis in October 1962 was that the frequency of those messages increased. More and more American planes were flying overheard, and they were ordered to double up on the radar. “So, when you’re sitting in a darkened room,” he remembers, “…you get to speculate, well, you know, what if? Because we see the planes going up and we see them twelve hours later coming down, well what if we don’t see ‘em coming down? You’ll know what’s going on.” They speculated, but they knew that if something were to happen, no one would be coming to get them down off the line. “Who the hell would, and I say with seven people or three people, good luck and good bye.”

In Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, Anita remembers going to bed, terrified after watching the evening news, and thinking that, if she were going to die, she didn’t want her babies to have to live without her. A young mother and wife of the town doctor, she watched the news and discussed the developing situation with friends and family. Aware that it was unlikely the Russians would choose Foam Lake as a primary threat, she nevertheless worried that a renegade bomb would hit the area because of their proximity.

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7 Brian, interviewed by author, Carp, Ontario, 3 June 2010.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
to the DEW line station to the north. “It was like living in the black hole, you know? And I was so panicky, that’s the only word I can say was panicky. Because I loved my little babies and I just thought, if I’m going to die, I want them dead too, because how are they going to live without me, you know? It was a very scary thing.”

At night, when her husband came home, they discussed emergency plans, tried to make the house airtight to stop radioactive dust from coming in, and bought extra food and batteries in case they had to use the area under the stairs they had set aside for a shelter.

Given the experiences of the individuals above, there is much more to the story of Canada’s experiences in October 1962 than what Diefenbaker and the Canadian government were doing. Canada had nothing to do with the negotiations between Kennedy and Khrushchev to remove the missiles from Cuba, other than a tangential role as an ally in continental defence within the structure of NATO. Prime Minister Diefenbaker was notified of the crisis brewing by Livingston Merchant, former American ambassador to Canada, only hours before Kennedy went public and announced to the world on primetime television that there were offensive missile sites under construction in Cuba. Kennedy expected nothing more from Canada than compliance and support, which Diefenbaker did eventually offer. All of the above are true statements. However, this is not the whole story.

While the Canadian government did not have an official diplomatic role in the crisis, nor was Diefenbaker’s opinion sought by Kennedy, English Canadians nonetheless understood and reacted to the crisis in an active manner. Diefenbaker attempted to find a

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10 Anita, interviewed by author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
course of action that suited a variety of perspectives: his own nationalist stance, pro-American voices in Canada, those who wanted to see Canada’s Bomarcs armed with nuclear weapons as well as those who vociferously refused to accept nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. By trying to appease these opposed groups, he became known as the “dithering” Prime Minister who could not support his ally. Yet what Diefenbaker and his cabinet were doing during the Cuban missile crisis is not the whole story. To discover the Canadian experience of the Cuban missile crisis, we must look beyond Ottawa to see and hear what Canadians were thinking and doing. When the political and diplomatic story is united with the reaction from Canadians who experienced the crisis through their television sets, newspapers and radios, we can understand why Diefenbaker hesitated so long in taking an official stand and how his government operated during the crisis.

Survival in the shadow of nuclear war was certainly a primary concern, but many Canadians understood, and most importantly, reacted to the crisis in the context of larger issues. They thought relations with the United States, Cuba and the rest of the world were at stake. One cannot simply say that this issue was solely a matter of Canadian-American relations, or that the nationalistic image of Canada as a peaceable middle power was the primary concern. Rather, all these concerns melded together in the various public voices to create a web of meanings from which Canadians derived their positions on what Canada ought to do. This chapter will detail the events of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada, beginning with a brief background section on the years leading up to the crisis.
The Setting: Canada in the Postwar World

When Diefenbaker suggested that a United Nations inspection team be sent to Cuba to verify the missile sites, he had no inkling that the American president would view the suggestion as counterproductive and insulting. Kennedy believed he already had the proof, and now it was time to decide what to do about it. Diefenbaker’s suggestion drew on a growing tradition: Canada’s reputation as a peaceable middle power. To understand why Diefenbaker made the suggestion, and other events of the Canadian Cuban missile crisis, some background is necessary. We must understand how Canadians and their government understood their place in the world in October 1962. Recent events had set a precedent which Canadians wanted to live up to.

Canada emerged from the Second World War with an increased status. The military’s performance in key areas overseas in both World Wars showed that the country was not only capable of leading its own armed forces, but excelled in doing so. The armed forces were increasingly hailed as one aspect of a modern nation that was developing independence on the world stage. The government also exhibited increasing independence from Britain, despite the fact that Canada remained a Commonwealth nation. Indeed, the postwar period was one in which many were clamouring for more independence from Britain and a greater degree of self-determination. Whether or not that meant increased ties with the United States, as many who wished to remain allied predominantly with the British Commonwealth though it inevitably would, it nevertheless meant that Canada could act on its own and determine its own future as an emerging middle power.
The concept of Canada as a middle power has provoked much debate among historians, social critics, and the general public. Canada’s military was a capable fighting force, the government was making serious strides in becoming a self-governing nation separate from its former colonial/Dominion status, and the people of Canada were beginning to see themselves less and less as citizens of the British Empire. However, the idea that Canada emerged from the Second World War as a serious force to be reckoned with has been exaggerated. Arthur Andrew, a former civil servant within the Department of External Affairs, remembers that the postwar years were a high point for Canada. For External Affairs in particular, they were “golden years when its reputation was high and Canada was cutting quite a figure as a Middle Power on the international scene.”  

Andrew also remembers that Canada played a significant role in postwar developments, including the founding of the United Nations, and was at least the “prototype if not the inventor of the Middle Power concept.” The middle power concept allowed for countries such as Canada and Australia, which had a modicum of influence and power, to chart a path between the superpowers and developing nations that had little power in postwar global affairs.

Andrew Cohen has also argued that Canada’s current position in the world has significantly strayed from the path of international prestige and diplomacy. In his bestselling book, While Canada Slept, Cohen argues that “our vision is less broad today that it was in the past…We are no longer as strong a soldier, as generous a donor, and as

12 Ibid., p. x.
effective a diplomat, and it has diminished us as a people.”\textsuperscript{13} He believes that Canada’s reputation as a middle power, as a diplomat, as a nation with influence was never greater than when Lester Pearson, Hume Wrong and Norman Robertson were at the helm.

Indeed, “such was Pearson’s impact that no prime minister since has failed to evoke his legacy or tried to escape his shadow.”\textsuperscript{14} Even Pearson, as Prime Minister, had a difficult time emerging from his own shadow. Ultimately, \textit{While Canada Slept} is a clarion call for Canadians to grapple with their identity, how far they have fallen from power and prestige and to determine how to change that trend. In this dissertation, I do not quarrel with Cohen’s argument or his mission for Canadians. Rather, I seek to ask why these ideas of Canada’s postwar status were so heady, why they have inspired such lamentations as Cohen’s, and why these inflated ideas of the diplomacy and idealism of the postwar period have held and continue to hold such power over the imagination.

These are particularly important questions in light of other scholarship which point out that the actual power and prestige that Canada held in the postwar period is not as great as previously thought. As historian Adam Chapnick has shown, for example, Canada’s role in the founding of the United Nations was limited. Canada’s diplomats were relatively late in beginning the task of postwar planning, and it was only within the last two years of the Second World War that Canadian civil servants began to be concerned with the postwar order and become involved in the negotiations that would eventually lead to the creation of the United Nations. Disagreements and tensions between key individuals within External Affairs meant that there was no unified approach

\textsuperscript{13} Andrew Cohen, \textit{While Canada Slept: How We Lost Our Place in the World} (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2003), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 3.
to the Canadian involvement with these negotiations, and the country’s real contribution was not in matters of security but rather on the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.\textsuperscript{15} The idea that Canadians played a foundational role in the creation of the UN has nevertheless persisted within the press, popular accounts of the era, and popular culture. Canadian participation in the postwar global order of things has become something of a founding myth, particularly as the Cold War developed and the world began to choose sides. Why have these myths have become so ingrained within the popular memory of the early Cold War years in Canada? Some of the basis of the myth stems from Canada’s involvement in the Suez Canal crisis. The story of this crisis is long and complicated, but it was frequently referenced during the missile crisis by Diefenbaker, Pearson, the press, and many Canadians across the country. Thus we need to understand Canada’s role during the Suez crisis, and the themes of Suez which became important for Canadians six years later.

The Suez Canal is a waterway in Egypt that connects Europe to Asia. Constructed in the late nineteenth century, funded significantly by British and French investors, it became a key area around which Cold War interest centered. Americans wanted the Middle East to remain within the western sphere of influence and feared Soviet incursion. Nasser, the new President of Egypt, was exceedingly aware of the strategic value of the Canal. However, the story of the Suez crisis actually begins with the Aswan High Dam, which was falling apart. Beginning in 1955 and continuing into

\textsuperscript{15} Chapnick, \textit{The Middle Power Project}, p. 5. While Chapnick argues that Canada did not have as great a role in the founding of the UN as popular discourses in Canada would have it, Keating nevertheless points out the various other multilateral initiatives in which Canada was involved in the postwar period, such as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the Commonwealth, to name only a few. See Keating, p. 1.
the next year, Nasser sought funding from the World Bank for funding to repair the dam. It was vital because it provided much needed water for irrigation for the area.\textsuperscript{16} He did manage to secure some funding, but it was contingent upon support from other financial backers. Although the United States and Britain discussed helping finance the Dam, so as to keep Soviet influence in the area to a minimum, they ultimately decided against it. Despite Cold War strategy, the British and Americans withdrew their offer of assistance. Nasser was neither surprised nor upset by this decision. He did, however, take exception to the insulting manner in which he was told.\textsuperscript{17} In retaliation, on 26 July 1956, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. He announced the Canal would be kept open, the (predominantly French and British) shareholders would be compensated, and that the foreign pilots and workers would keep their jobs. But these details did not matter, and public outrage in France and Britain was “swift and virulent.”\textsuperscript{18} British Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden was particularly outraged by Nasser’s move, and wanted immediate and decisive action to retake the Canal, claiming that nationalizing the canal was illegal.\textsuperscript{19} The United States, in contrast to its allies, recommended caution, diplomacy, and a restrained course of action.

Growing tension between Britain and the United States made the Suez crisis an important political issue for Canadian officials as well. Pearson, Minister of the Department of External Affairs, recommended that Canada remain non-committal. He astutely observed that Canada’s two major allies, Britain and the United States, were

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\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{19} John Melady, \textit{Pearson’s Prize: Canada and the Suez Crisis} (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2006), pp. 52-53.
\end{flushleft}
headed for a conflict, and that Canada could potentially be torn apart. As Michael Carroll notes, “Nasser’s nationalization of the Suez Canal Company opened a Pandora’s box, unleashing competing interests among Canada’s most important allies.”

Pearson believed that a diplomatic solution was possible, however, and began negotiating through the minefield of competing interests.

In August 1956, twenty-two nations gathered in London to attempt to find a solution that would satisfy all interested parties. After days of discussion, they created a proposal for Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies to present to Nasser. This proposal suggested the formation of an international group to control the Canal and ensure the continuation of business as normal. This would safeguard shareholders’ profits. Nasser did not agree to the proposal, and the issue finally went before the UN Security Council. Negotiations dragged on and other events took precedence. But then, on 29 October 1956, Israeli paratroopers were launched into Egypt, “officially turning the Suez Crisis into a hot war.”

Finally, the issue took center stage, as people everywhere realized that the incident could trigger a third world war. The Americans broke with their allies and condemned French and British involvement in helping to orchestrate the Israeli attack. The United Nations General Assembly met to attempt to settle the matter before it escalated out of control and into a dispute between the superpowers.

Pearson was concerned that the situation would escalate even further out of control. At the United Nations, the United States had suggested a cease-fire, but Canada abstained because Pearson was concerned that the provisions were not strong enough. As Michael Carroll notes, Pearson then suggested the provision for a UN force to be sent in

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20 Carroll, Pearson’s Peacekeepers, p. 11.
21 Ibid., p. 22.
to ensure the peace while peace negotiations could be worked out. Canadian Prime Minister Louis St Laurent and the Cabinet supported Pearson’s actions, although public opinion at the time was split. Nevertheless, he pressed on and continued to gather support and votes. Finally a resolution was passed to create the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), though the details of drafting, equipping and deploying this force were left to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Dag Hammarskjöld. A force made up of eight different nations, not including any permanent members of the Security Council (notably the United States, France or Britain) was sent into the area. The next year, Pearson was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace for his efforts in averting the crisis.

The Suez Canal crisis set a significant precedent in Canada. Most often, it is discussed in connection with the creation of the idea that Canada is a peacekeeping nation. While this peacekeeping myth was in infancy even by the time of the Cuban missile crisis, the idea of Canada as a peaceable middle power was nevertheless beginning to take hold as a part of Canada’s identity. In reality, however, Suez was the high point of Canadian diplomacy and peacekeeping, and most missions including and since Suez have been plagued with problems, from funding to lack of proper weapons, to questions about political expediency of interference in certain situations. The idea that

22 Ibid., pp. 28-30.
23 Melady, Pearson’s Prize, p. 114.
24 The sources on Canadian peacekeeping are vast and cover many of the missions with which Canadians have been involved as well as the problems they have encountered on those missions. See J.L. Granatstein and David J. Bercuson, War and Peacekeeping: From South Africa to the Gulf – Canada’s Little Wars (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1991); Sean M. Maloney, Canada and UN Peacekeeping: Cold War by Other Means, 1945-1970 (St. Catharine’s, Ontario: Vanwell Publishing, 2002); Sherene Razack, Dark Threats and White Knights: the Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping and the New Imperialism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Robert Reford, “Peacekeeping at Suez, 1956,” in Canadian Foreign Policy: Selected Cases, ed. Don Munton and John Kirton (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Canada, 1992), pp. 58-77; Kevin A.
Canada, as a peaceable middle power, could help resolve the crisis in October 1962 and its implications are discussed in much greater detail in chapter five of this dissertation. However, it is significant here that Diefenbaker, already in office by the time Pearson won the Nobel prize, was acutely aware of Pearson’s actions during the crisis, and his subsequent reputation as the great mediator. During the Suez crisis, Diefenbaker argued vociferously that Canada needed to support Britain and condemned St. Laurent and Pearson for their tempered stance and attempts to chart an independent path. Only six years later, his stance had changed and he tried to do essentially the same thing as Pearson, though he did so for significantly different reasons and with dramatically different results.

**John G. Diefenbaker**

As the Suez crisis calmed down, and the UNEF was deployed, the country geared up for a general election which would result in not only a new Prime Minister, but the return of the Conservatives to power after more than twenty years of opposition. It is imperative to understand Diefenbaker, how he came to power, and a few of the key issues that plagued his term in office, since these issues resurfaced during the Cuban missile crisis and were a significant factor in his downfall. Diefenbaker’s personality is often credited with much of his reaction, or lack thereof during the crisis, and therefore it is important to understand what sort of leader he was.

Diefenbaker was born on 18 September 1895. Although his family moved around, they eventually settled in Saskatoon so that he and his brother Elmer could attend school. His father was an intellectual and a dreamer, and Diefenbaker got his desire for knowledge from him, but it was his mother who gave him the drive to enter politics.\(^{25}\) Ironically, given his future reputation as a fiery orator, as a teenager Diefenbaker was a nervous public speaker and took an oratory class at Saskatoon Collegiate in order to get over this fear.\(^{26}\) He attended the University of Saskatchewan, got his degree, attended law school, and after a brief stint in the military during the First World War, which was cut short due to medical reasons, opened a law office in Wakaw, Saskatchewan in 1919.\(^{27}\) As a lawyer, Diefenbaker became known for his antics in the courtroom and ability to keep a jury engaged with his speeches.\(^{28}\) Over the years, he knew that he wanted to do more, and decided to enter politics.

For years, however, despite constant campaigning, he did nothing but lose elections at the municipal, provincial, and federal level. Finally in 1940, was elected as the Member of Parliament for the Lake Centre riding in Saskatchewan, and became a Conservative backbencher for the Opposition. As a politician and campaigner, Diefenbaker had the uncanny ability to speak directly to the people and make them feel as if they were really being heard, which fuelled his growing reputation as the great prairie populist. Anita recalled that “he was personable, and he remembered you. If he met you, and two years from there he would come up and say, hi Anita, how are you? He

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 15.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., pp. 1-33.

remembered names, and he remembered people and what they did very well, and I think that was one of his very big selling points.”

As Peter Newman wrote, he had a true and almost mystical connection with “the people.”

As Prime Minister, “he gave prodigious energy to his office and tried hard to bring the federal administration into a more meaningful relationship with the average citizen.”

In a recent doctoral thesis, Cara Spittal examines Diefenbaker’s remarkable “moment” in history. She contends that Diefenbaker came to power in a moment in Canadian politics “in which many people were just as insecure and pensive about themselves and about nation, its identity, and its survival, as Diefenbaker was himself.”

To understand how he came into power and what it was about him that appealed to the Canadian public so much, Spittal looks at his political style, which was remarkable for its method of combating the liberal “other.” Diefenbaker appealed to patriotism and insecurity, he argued that “citizens and patriots had to rise up and recognize the qualities of a true, national leader.”

Spittal’s is an excellent analysis of Diefenbaker, but also of the political and cultural climate in which he answered a need that the country had for his type of leadership.

Once he entered the office of the Prime Minister, however, Diefenbaker had difficulty governing the country. He was an outsider to the policy making process, and his over-reliance on letters from Canadians resulted in “administrative chaos.”

Diefenbaker was well aware of the problems of his time. Canada needed to re-establish ties with London after the Suez Crisis, while simultaneously maintaining a harmonious

29 Anita, interviewed by author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
30 Newman, Renegade in Power, p. xii.
31 Ibid., p. xi.
33 Ibid., p. 2.
34 Robinson, Diefenbaker’s World, p. 6.
35 Newman, Renegade, p. xiii.
relationship with the United States. This was not difficult while Eisenhower was still in office, since Diefenbaker and “Ike” enjoyed a friendly and warm working relationship. However, Diefenbaker’s administration became plagued with indecision and Cabinet discord. This would become particularly relevant during the Cuban missile crisis, when the difference of opinion between Harkness and Green over nuclear weapons would come to a head.

In the years since Diefenbaker’s period in office, a legend has evolved about his leadership. Many of the commentators on Diefenbaker and his time in office have focused on his personality, arguing it was the driving force for his electoral success in the first place, but also for why his time in office was ultimately a (so-called) failure. Peter Newman, for example, would definitely say that Diefenbaker’s time in office was a failure, as “no other Canadian politician in this century could claim the emotional conquest of a generation; yet no prime minister ever disillusioned his disciples more…the right instincts were in him, but throughout his stormy stewardship, they languished in the cupboard of his soul.”

Recent biographers have attempted to look at the man and the myth, because one cannot be understood without the other. As Denis Smith argues, it is essential to understand both, since

privately and publicly, he was never fully in control of his emotions…he was scarred by his failures. He was suspicious of colleagues, unfamiliar with the play of political compromise, inexperienced in sharing tasks and authority…But he was also a man of high theatrical talent, stubbornness, and pluck, who found great pleasure in the political battle.

It is this Diefenbaker with which this study is concerned. Understanding this complicated personality and his style of leadership is vital to understand how he reacted. Both

36 Newman, Renegade, p. xi.
37 Smith, Rogue Tory, p. xiii.
Diefenbaker’s myth and reality have become intrinsically connected to the story of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada.

**Conflict and Cold War Tension**

After the 1957 election which elevated him to Prime Minister, Diefenbaker wasted no time cementing relationships with both London and Washington. Sir Anthony Eden was no longer the British Prime Minister after his performance during the Suez Crisis. Harold Macmillan, a man whom Diefenbaker greatly admired, had replaced him. Diefenbaker also cultivated a close relationship with President Eisenhower. However, within a few years, events in Cuba would change the balance of power. On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and their band of revolutionaries took over the government of Cuba. Fulgencio Batista fled Havana offering little resistance, clearing the way for Castro’s revolutionary government. The United States watched the developing situation in Cuba with concern, since there were those close to Fidel Castro who were suspected of communism, and that could not be tolerated in America’s backyard. Nevertheless, Castro installed a government which proved to be remarkably stable. The United States formally recognized the Cuban government in early January, and Canada followed suit the next day (a more detailed examination of the history of Cuba’s relations with both Canada and the United States will be detailed in chapter three). Relations between the United States and Cuba soon turned sour. The United States ultimately decided that Castro needed to be removed, and hatched a plan to send a force of Cuban exiles to overthrow him. The Bay of Pigs invasion failed, and American-Cuban relations continued to worsen. The Canadian relationship with Cuba was
different, and is often held up as one of unbroken good relations. Some Canadians, Diefenbaker included, were concerned that alienating Cuba would force it into the Soviet camp. Diefenbaker probably would have preferred taking a less tolerant approach, Cold Warrior that he was, but pragmatism won the day and Canadian relations with Cuba nevertheless remained stable and productive.

Berlin was also an area of strategic concern. In the heart of the country that had been split after the Second World War between the major occupying powers, Berlin was a powerful, and contested, site of tension. It was the location of several Cold War crises, such as the Berlin blockade and airlift in the late 1940s, when Joseph Stalin shut down access to the western sector of the city by road. The western nations, America chief among them, responded by airlifting in food and supplies. The conflict never escalated to war, but it was one of many early Cold War incidents centering around Berlin. The situation between East and West Berlin grew increasingly tense, as those living in the Eastern sector of the city fled to the west in increasing numbers. Eventually, the Soviet Union decided to put a stop to the mass migration. Their answer to the problem, the Berlin Wall, became one of the most enduring symbols of the chasm between east and

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38 The Bay of Pigs invasion was an incident in which the American CIA trained and equipped Cuban exiles and assisted them in landing in Cuba with the intention of re-taking the government. The invasion was a spectacular failure not only for the exiles, many of whom were jailed in Cuba, but also for the Kennedy government. See, for varying accounts of the invasion, Juan Carlos Rodríguez, The Bay of Pigs: The Most Colossal CIA Operation Against Fidel Castro (Havana: Editorial Capitán San Luis, 2007); Aiyaz Husain, “Covert Action and US Cold War Strategy in Cuba, 1961-62,” Cold War History 5, 1 (2005): 23-53; Van Gosse, Where the Boys Are: Cuba, the Cold War, and the Making of A New Left (London and New York: Verso, 1993); Kathryn C. Statler and Andrew L. Johns, eds., The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World and the Globalization of the Cold War (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006); Howard Jones, The Bay of Pigs (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) among others. For an excellent discussion and example of the range of opinions on Canada’s relationship with Cuba see Robert Wright and Lana Wylie, eds., Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
39 See Dennis Molinaro, “‘Calculated Diplomacy’: John Diefenbaker and the Origins of Canada’s Cuba Policy,” in Wright and Wylie, Our Place, pp. 75-95.
west. The wall also became a powerful symbol of Soviet repression when American politicians, including Lyndon Johnson, Robert Kennedy and finally, John F. Kennedy visited and made highly publicized speeches there. One of the most famous of these was President Kennedy’s “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech in 1963.\(^\text{40}\) The symbolic power of Berlin was also clear during the Cuban missile crisis, as some believed Khrushchev put the missiles in Cuba to force Kennedy’s hand on the Berlin situation.\(^\text{41}\)

Cold war strategy and relations among allies were important to consider, but it is also important to remember that fear of the bomb was a reality of everyday life as well. The individuals interviewed for this study consistently asserted that it was a terrifying time, and others have agreed that one cannot forget or gloss over how real the potential for nuclear war felt. The defining elements of nuclear fear in popular culture in the United States have been well-documented, but it must be remembered that these currents certainly existed north of the border as well.\(^\text{42}\) The Canadian government, following the American lead, put out a series of civil defence manuals, for example, starting in the early 1950s and continuing on into the 1960s. *Civil Defence: Personal Protection Under Atomic Attack* published in 1951 by the Authority of the Minister of National Health and


Welfare warned that “it is quite possible, in the event of war, that atomic bombs would be dropped on Canadian cities. They might even be dropped on smaller places by accident or for some special reason.”\(^{43}\) One of the first of many civil defence booklets, it advised people to take precautions against nuclear blasts and fallout. Trying to make the potential of being blasted out of existence more relevant to everyday life, the booklet reminded citizens:

> this business of getting ready for an attack by an atomic or some other kind of bomb does not mean the place in which we live is going to be bombed. It simply means that we are playing safe. It’s the sort of thing we do all the time when we buy insurance, put lightning rods on the roof or pour anti-freeze into the car radiator. We just don’t want to take a chance.\(^{44}\)

The booklet further advised the do-it-yourselfer exactly how to build such a shelter. The manual also advised people of what they could do immediately in preparation for a bomb, during an attack and in the aftermath. Only one in the series of civil defence booklets that would be published by the government, such as *Your Basement Fallout Shelter* (1960) and *Fallout on the Farm* (1967). These manuals supplemented the national exercise tocsins, one of which happened in 1961, which were dry-runs for a real atomic attack. CBC coverage of the Calgary evacuation shows a bizarre exercise whereby hundreds of families left their homes for the day and “evacuated” the city limits. They planned for expected traffic patterns, and made sure there was a police presence in the evacuated areas to prevent looting.\(^{45}\)

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\(^{44}\) Ibid.

While these efforts were often made in an attempt to prepare the average citizen and make people aware of the danger, one cannot help but wonder about the long term effects. Duck and cover drills and installing useless “shelters” in the basement may only have served to increase fear and the realization that, if nuclear war broke out, there was probably little that citizens could do to save themselves. A key reason why many did not build shelters was psychological: “most EMO officials concluded that Canadians did not build shelters because they did not want to think about nuclear war or [Civil Defence] measures.” Furthermore, despite constant discussion of the need for civil defence initiatives, the reality of a serious civil defence program in Canada was uncertain. In his doctoral dissertation, Andrew Burtch has shown how civil defence initiatives in the early Cold War period ultimately failed. In an interesting examination of the relationship between the citizen, state and military, Burtch concludes that due to lack of sustained financial support and a fundamental ideological contradiction, civil defence was unsuccessful: “successive governments pursued and altered the policy, and drafted plans behind closed doors, but never provided the public with the tools required to create a meaningful defence.”

The Missiles in Cuba

The remainder of this chapter will outline the chronology of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada. The crisis has been given a great deal of attention from historians from the American and, to a lesser extent, Soviet perspectives. Though in recent years the Cuban perspective is beginning to receive more attention, the focus here will nevertheless

46 Burtch, “If We Are Attacked,” p. 291.
47 Ibid., p. 28.
center on the Canadian experience of these “thirteen days.” Pieced together through government archives and the major daily newspapers, as well as secondary sources, this story of the Cuban missile crisis was as much about ban-the-bomb protests in Calgary and mock UN debates in Regina as it was about Diefenbaker’s speeches and Kennedy’s proclamations.

The first day of the crisis was 14 October, when American U-2 spy planes took the first definitive pictures of missile sites under construction in Cuba. Once analyzed, the photos were presented to President Kennedy two days later. Kennedy then formed the Executive Committee of the National Security, or ExComm, to bring all his advisors together so he could determine a response. The ExComm consisted of his brother and Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Dean McCone and many others that Kennedy deemed necessary advisors during the crisis. By 18 October, several more photos had been taken showing sites with medium and long-range missiles. Discussion in the ExComm focused on how to respond with enough force to show the world, especially the Soviets, that America would not stand for missiles of this type only ninety miles from its shores. Discussion continued through the week. Kennedy began to be convinced that a blockade, rather than an air strike or invasion, which some of his advisors would have preferred, was the best way to go. On 21 October, Kennedy briefed British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that he intended to blockade Cuba, and that he

48 Kennedy, Thirteen Days, along with the movie starring Kevin Costner (2000) of the same title made this phrase famous, though it is a misnomer. From the American President’s perspective the most acute phase of the crisis was thirteen days long, but the public was only made aware of the missiles on Cuba on 22 October. While the crisis actually lasted much longer, Khrushchev agreed to remove the missiles on 27 October. They were not actually completely removed from Cuba until late November.

49 Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997) contains the transcripts of many of the major events of the crisis, including what happened during this first meeting all the way through to the successful resolution of the crisis.
was going to announce it the following evening, Monday night, 22 October, at 7 p.m. The other major allies, including France, Canada, West Germany, Italy, India and other NATO members were briefed the next day, only hours before the televised speech.50

Therefore on Monday, 22 October, Livingston Merchant, former American ambassador to Canada arrived to brief Prime Minister Diefenbaker. Merchant transmitted a message from President Kennedy, which informed the Canadian Prime Minister that the Americans “are now in the possession of clear evidence which Ambassador Merchant will explain to you, that the Soviets have secretly installed offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba, and that some of them may already be operational.”51

While the press did not publish full stories of the details of the crisis before Tuesday, Canadian newspapers were nevertheless aware that something was about to happen, and they reported that the White House was planning a televised broadcast that might have repercussions for either Cuba or Berlin. The front page of the Calgary Herald announced that “U.S. Move on Cuba Hinted as Crisis Talks Called,”52 and the Globe and Mail announced that “Lights Burn Late at the White House… as Kennedy and His Advisers Meet,” and following that up with the observation that “U.S. Forces Multiply off Cuba as Tension Grows in Washington.”53 The whole world knew that something was about to happen, but not many people outside the inner circles in Washington, Moscow and

50 There have been many discussions about Kennedy’s discussions during this week, and some have argued that the fact that Kennedy had a week in which to make decisions and deliberate without the press demanding immediate action made it possible for him to steer a much more peaceable course. Had the press got wind of the crisis right away, or had the published the story immediately when they did begin to hear stories (in fact, the press was aware that something was happening much sooner than the general public, but they held off printing the story at President Kennedy’s request) the crisis may have turned out quite differently. See Munton and Welch, The Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 5 and p. 60.
Havana yet understood the full implications of what Kennedy was about to announce. At 7:00 p.m. eastern standard time, however, that would change.

Kennedy addressed the nation from behind his desk in the Oval Office. Sitting in front of the cameras, the young and charismatic leader looked tired and anxious. “Good evening, my fellow citizens,” he began.

This government, as promised, has maintained the closest surveillance of the Soviet military build-up on the island of Cuba. Within the last week, unmistakable evidence has established the fact that a series of offensive missile sites is now in preparation on that imprisoned island. The purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere.54

The sites under construction contained medium range ballistic missiles which could reach Washington, D.C., the Panama Canal, and the Southeastern United States. There was also photographic evidence of intermediate range ballistic missiles, “capable of travelling more than twice as far – and thus capable of striking most of the major cities in the Western Hemisphere, ranging as far North as Hudson’s Bay, Canada, and as far South as Lima, Peru.”55 If that was not alarming enough, there were also jet bombers and air bases under construction. The situation was urgent:

This … transformation of Cuba into an important strategic base – by the presence of these large, long-range, and clearly offensive weapons of sudden mass destruction – constitutes an explicit threat to the peace and security of all the Americas…This action also contradicts the repeated assurances of Soviet spokesmen, both publicly and privately delivered, that the arms build-up in Cuba would retain its original defensive character, and that the Soviet Union had no need or desire to station strategic missiles on the territory of any other nation…this sudden, clandestine decision to station strategic weapons for the first time outside of Soviet soil – is a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo which cannot be accepted by this country if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe.56

54 DB, Kennedy Address to Nation, 22 October 1962.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
American missiles pointed at the Soviet Union had long been in place in Turkey (though they were outdated and the American authorities were planning to remove them). This double standard was evidently not relevant. Kennedy compared Khrushchev’s aggressive conduct with German expansion in the 1930s and insisted that it could not be allowed. He then outlined the immediate steps the United States planned to take to halt further developments in Cuba. He imposed a “quarantine” and ordered continued and increased surveillance of the island. He announced that any missile launched from Cuba was essentially launched from the Soviet Union; a dangerous assumption at the height of the Cold War, which would likely trigger an American nuclear retaliation. He also requested a meeting of the Organization of American States (OAS) and of the Security Council of the United Nations. He announced that troops would be sent to reinforce those at Guantanamo Bay. Finally, he sent an official plea to Chairman Khrushchev to “halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace and to stable relations between our two nations.” He closed his speech with words that have become part of the Kennedy legacy: “Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right – not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this Hemisphere, and, we hope, around the world. God willing, that goal will be achieved. Thank you and good night.”

57 The use of the word “quarantine” is an interesting choice, especially since many have since called the action a blockade. The difference is small but vital; use of the word “blockade” implies it was an act of war. This was particularly apt as many at the time and since have debated the legality of Kennedy’s so-called quarantine.
58 Kennedy address.
59 Ibid.
That evening after Kennedy’s speech, Diefenbaker made a statement to the House of Commons. Diefenbaker noted that while it was impossible to say much about it, Kennedy’s announcement was “sombre and challenging.” He “ask[ed] Canadians as well as free men everywhere in the world not to panic at this time. This is a time for calmness…Above all, it is a time when each of us must endeavour to do his part to assure the preservation of peace not only in this hemisphere but everywhere in the world.”

Diefenbaker agreed that the bases were offensive, but that the United Nations should “be charged at the earliest possible moment with this serious problem.” He also suggested:

> what people all over the world want tonight and will want is a full and complete understanding of what is taking place in Cuba. What can be done? … I suggest that if there is a desire on the part of the U.S.S.R. to have the facts, if a group of nations, perhaps the eight nations comprising the unaligned members of the 18 nation disarmament committee, be given the opportunity of making an on-site inspection in Cuba to ascertain what the facts are, a major step forward would be taken.

This speech, as well as Kennedy’s, were carried in many of the major daily newspapers the next day. H. Basil Robinson, the liaison officer between External Affairs and the Prime Minister’s Office, has discussed the tone and origin of this speech at length in his memoirs. He notes that Diefenbaker saw a memo drafted by Howard Green shortly before the speech that compared the situation to the Suez Crisis of 1956. This, combined with the lack of adequate time to prepare his statement (and have it vetted), perhaps explains why his statement that night veered away from the full support that the

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60 DCC, Vol. 56, File MG 01/XII/C/120, Extract from Hansard, October 22, 1962. “Cuba – A Statement of Prime Minister Following Television Broadcast by President of the United States.”
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 See, for example, the *Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Ottawa Citizen*, and *Globe and Mail*, 23 October 1962, among others.
Americans expected. The reaction to Diefenbaker’s seemingly harmless and common-sense suggestion ranged from hearty praise for Canadians embracing a peaceful solution, to condemnation for calling President Kennedy a liar, to accusations of appeasement for allowing such neutrality to rule the day.

Nevertheless, immediately after Kennedy’s speech, protestors swung into action. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) drafted and released a statement to the press on Monday night, in which they boldly stated that,

No fair-minded Canadian can accept as good coin, the charges by President John. F. Kennedy that “surveillance” of the Island Republic of Cuba has discovered the existence of missiles with nuclear potential on Cuban soil. This charge by the President of the United States must be seen for what it is: the next logical step in a long series of aggressions against the sovereign state of Cuba.

In addition, the FPCC quickly put together a protest in Vancouver in front of the U.S. consulate. About one hundred and fifty people strong, they marched outside with signs and slogans such as “Hands Off Cuba,” “No More Koreas,” and “Try Kennedy for War Crimes.” These protestors met with resistance from a “frail, grey-haired old lady” who responded to their slogans with her own: “God save the Queen,” and “God bless Kennedy.” The protestors and their adversary kept up the march for approximately two hours before dispersing. This protest was only the first of many throughout the week. The lone elderly woman would be replaced by pro-American groups, and the FPCC would continue their protests and be joined by students, members of other Cuba solidarity groups, and advocates for disarmament.

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64 Robinson, Diefenbaker’s World, p. 286.
65 LAC, Fair Play For Cuba Committee Records, R10995, Vol. 70, File 3. For an excellent discussion of this group in the Canadian context see Cynthia Wright, “Between Nation and Empire: The Fair Play for Cuba Committees and the Making of Canada-Cuba Solidarity in the Early 1960s,” in Wright and Wylie, eds., Our Place in the Sun, pp. 96-120.
66 Calgary Herald, 23 October 1962, p. 11.
67 Vancouver Sun, 23 October 1962, p. 25.
Tuesday, 23 October

The next day, the diplomatic maneuvering began. Khrushchev sent Kennedy the first of several telegrams he would send that week, officially protesting the quarantine and insisting that the weapons bases on Cuba were defensive, not offensive. He also sent a telegram to Fidel Castro, reassuring him that the Soviets would not back down.68 The Organization of American States (OAS) met in Washington and approved a resolution which supported the blockade. Also, Kennedy and his brother, Robert, began looking for a diplomatic solution to the crisis using informal channels that were not widely publicized at the time, to soften the public threat Kennedy made the night before.69

Diefenbaker deliberated on a potential course of action. In Cabinet meetings and his office, advisers informed him that Canadians needed to be reminded to stay calm, but at the same time, the government quietly started to prepare for the worst possible scenario. One memo that Diefenbaker received from R. B. Bryce, Secretary to the Cabinet, a key counselor, and head of the Emergency Measures Organization, advised him that an announcement from the government could cause unnecessary panic.70 Diefenbaker also received a telegram from American Secretary of State Dean Rusk further discussing the situation. He stressed the danger of the situation in Cuba and differentiated between the missile sites there and those established by the U.S. in Turkey.71 Green, in particular, was troubled by the questionable legality of Kennedy’s

68 Munton and Welch, Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 64.
69 Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble.”
71 DCC, Vol. 56 MG 01/XII/C/120 Cuba n.d., 1960-1962 Telegram from Dean Rusk to Diefenbaker.
action. At the Prime Minister’s request, Minister of External Affairs Howard Green drafted a memo discussing the issue. He noted that there was no real precedent for Kennedy’s action since the Americans did not wish to stop all ships bound for Cuba, merely those carrying offensive weapons material. In his opinion, the only real precedent was Britain’s blockade of Greece in 1886, then of Venezuela in 1902, and in the latter situation they shortly thereafter declared war, making it an unhelpful precedent. Green wrote that “pacific blockades have been considered by practically all writers as admissible, as long as they do not extend to the seizure or sequestration of vessels other than those of the blockaded state.” He nevertheless believed that any pacific blockade needed to be approved by the Security Council of the United Nations. Imposing the blockade as a matter of self-defence may have justified the move, as Kennedy surely thought it did, but there was a difference, Green argued, between the threat of war and an actual armed attack. “In consequence,” he concluded, “while it would not be correct to assert categorically the legality of the United States move, it is impossible as well to conclude that it is illegal.” He also pointed out several areas in which the United States had indicated they would remain within the “bounds of legality.” After all, they went to the Security Council immediately, they claimed the blockade was a temporary measure, and international trade would not be effected. Armed reprisal was only intended if intercepted ships refused to allow a search. There was, therefore, no easy answer. Diefenbaker had to develop the government’s official position based on other factors. Minister of Defence Douglas Harkness, strongly advised full support of the American position and an increase of the official alert level to the same level as the American

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military, DEFCON 3. The tension between Green, who did not want nuclear weapons on Canadian soil, and Harkness, who wanted to raise the level of military readiness, would become one of the defining aspects of the crisis.73

On Tuesday, newspapers reported that the entire country east of Regina was within range of the missiles. This was illustrated by the map appearing in many newspapers, which visualized the range of the missiles on Cuba. Canadians also learned that the OAS had met and endorsed President Kennedy’s actions, so if more peaceful-minded Canadians were hoping for help in calming down the situation, it was not forthcoming from that direction.74 Formed in 1948, the OAS was intended to be a security organization along the lines of NATO, but in October 1962, Canada was not yet a member, despite American pressure to join. It was, however, a constant source of discussion in the press, especially as the Cuban missile crisis unfolded. Joseph Scanlon, a staff writer for the Toronto Daily Star, noticed the connection and observed that Canadian membership would likely arise again as an issue because of the events in Cuba. He reminded readers that “as recently as May 17, 1961, President Kennedy pushed the case for Canadian participation when he spoke about the need for united hemispheric action against communism, for defence and social reform to a joint session of our Parliament.”75

Other items in the newspapers on Tuesday informed their readers somewhat ominously that Cuban military units had mobilized and were ready in the event of an

73 For a discussion of the tension between Harkness and Green, see Robinson, Diefenbaker’s World, pp. 283-295.
American attack.\footnote{“Cubans Said Ready, Combat Units Poised,” \textit{Edmonton Journal}, 23 October 1962, p. 2.} There was “feverish activity” on the Winnipeg grain exchange, resulting in “spectacular rises in prices of flax and rye and attendant advances in all other commodities.”\footnote{“Cuban Crackdown Triggers Trading,” \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 24 October 1962, p. 18.} The stock market also took a dive because of the developing crisis.\footnote{“Cuban crisis sparks sharp drop in market,” \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 23 October 1962, p. 8.} Reports of false alarms and jittery nerves were filed from across the country. In Windsor, Ontario, an air raid siren was accidentally triggered when an operator pushed the wrong button; the intention was to test the emergency alarm systems in local industrial plants. The mayor heard the sirens and immediately called local civil defence and police authorities. He later said that “today was just the wrong day for a mistake like that.”\footnote{“Mistake Panics Canadians,” \textit{Victoria Daily Colonist}, 24 October 1962, p. 1.} The \textit{Toronto Daily Star} also reported a false alarm when sirens went off in Oakville on Tuesday morning. The town’s public fire alarm system was triggered by “a smoldering mattress in the 135-year-old Oakville House and a faulty sprinkler system in a nearby factory.” The fire alarm system sounded eerily like an air raid siren and several individuals called the operator and police department demanding answers.\footnote{“JFK Jitters Sirens Alarm Oakville,” \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, 23 October 1962, p. 4.} Obviously the situation in which the world found itself on that Tuesday was one of fear and tension, and the accidental sounding of alarms did not help defuse the situation.

Some individuals and organizations chose to do something about their fear and launched protests. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) continued their previous protest in Vancouver at the United States consulate, this time with about 250 individuals. It was “mostly students and working men” carrying signs and marching. Unlike their Monday night protest, instead of a frail, elderly woman, there were about fifty or so
people with signs such as “Well Done Kennedy” and “Good Job JFK.”

Others telegrammed the Prime Minister directly to tell him their thoughts on the crisis. The Manitoba branch of the Voice of Women (VOW), for example, supported his Monday night statement: “concerning Canada’s part in the present Cuban situation…[the VOW] warmly supports your recommendation for neutral investigation of American charges regarding the Cuban situation.”

The Saskatchewan branch of the same organization also sent Diefenbaker a telegram: “And so we ask our Prime Minister and our minister of external affairs to instruct our representatives at the United Nations to use all influence to prevail upon United States of America to reconsider its proclamation to take unilateral action in the blockade of Cuba, so that the problem of missile bases in Cuba can be dealt with by the United Nations.”

Many Canadians echoed this request during the Cuban missile crisis and believed that Canada had a duty to try to defuse the crisis.

Politicians also protested Kennedy’s actions. Conservative Member of Parliament Terry Nugent (Edmonton-Strathcona) sparked controversy when he made a speech in a Commons committee protesting the American action and insisting that Cuba, as a sovereign nation, had the right to defend itself. The Edmonton Journal reported his speech, saying that the “stunned” Committee interrupted him, since it had nothing to do with the economic discussion they were having. In an interview with the Edmonton Journal, he stood by his words, because he believed that most thinking Canadians thought the same as he did about the situation. Indeed, some citizens did agree with Nugent. Allan G. Grant wrote from Whonock, B.C. to tell Diefenbaker that “what he

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82 Reported in the Winnipeg Free Press, 23 October 1962, p. 2.
said, needed to be said. I believe that Canada should withdraw from NATO and it’s [sic] backing the USA in its warlike aggression against Cuba.”

Another Nugent supporter wrote that “many of my fellow farmers share my pleasure with the timely statements of Mr. Terry Nugent M.P. regarding the ill advised U.S. foreign policy, in first of all chopping Castro down when he came to the U.S.A. expecting aid and sympathy – then aiding the foolish invasion against him – and now trying to starve out the Cuban people.”

Others, however, thought that Nugent’s remarks were a “publicity stunt” and that “the people of this nation and of this commonwealth expect responsible prudent statements from the government recognizing the responsibilities of this nation in a period which could lead to the ultimate catastrophe.” Nugent, however, was not the only individual who made statements condemning the U.S. move. Tommy Douglas, former Premier of Saskatchewan and newly elected to the House of Commons in the Burnaby-Coquitlam riding of British Columbia, also protested Kennedy’s actions. The Regina Leader Post also carried a story detailing how the major political leaders for the province of Saskatchewan made statements asking for calm and expressing hope for a peaceful resolution.

Overall on Tuesday, Canadians were attempting to come to terms with the situation. Diefenbaker deliberated on the different actions he could take. He was only beginning to realize that public opinion would not allow Canada to chart a neutral course.

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88 “Political leaders fear crisis may lead to war,” Regina Leader Post, 23 October 1962, p. 3.
Every day that passed when Kennedy’s bold stance did not result in nuclear annihilation meant that he was increasingly a bold visionary standing up to a Soviet bluff. Conversely, every day that Diefenbaker did not publicly support the American president he risked the ire of those who believed that Canada’s security interests were best served by rapid alignment with Kennedy. Diefenbaker was not yet convinced, however, and continued to allow the Cabinet to debate. Protestors across the country were, for now, focused on Kennedy’s actions.

**Wednesday, 24 October**

Wednesday 24 October was, coincidentally, the 17th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. The international situation was a cloud over this organization’s birthday, and many celebratory events referenced what was happening in Cuba. High school students in Regina, for example, participated in a mock UN debate on the issue. After the “furor of the debate had died down,” which evidently included the Soviet representative banging a shoe on the desk in an imitation of Premier Khrushchev, the United States voted down a Soviet resolution calling the American blockade “a threat to international peace.” The real crisis, however, was heating up. Wednesday morning at 10 a.m. eastern time, the U.S. navy implemented Kennedy’s quarantine. U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, got involved in the crisis and sent messages to both Kennedy and Khrushchev in the attempt to mediate. The United States and the Soviet Union continued to stare each other down.

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Diefenbaker continued meeting with the Cabinet and deliberated on Canada’s official position. He began to face questions in the House of Commons about why he had not made it clear that the country stood behind the United States. Newspapers throughout the country reported that the Prime Minister’s appearance in the House on Wednesday was characterized by indecision and wavering. By contrast, Pearson showed leadership in his support of the American position. Well-known journalist Charles Lynch wrote a story that was published in many of the major daily newspapers drawing attention to growing tension between the United States and Canada. Lynch also discussed Diefenbaker’s tentative suggestion that a United Nations team be sent to Cuba and the negative reaction received from American officials. Pearson made a statement fully supporting the American action, which received national attention and praise and drawing further attention to the fact that Diefenbaker had not. The Globe and Mail reported that Pearson said “that Canada should give all the support that is possible to the position taken by the United States in the Cuban crisis. Canadians must have understanding of and sympathy with the U.S. position.”

Perhaps the largest protest of the week occurred in Vancouver. A rally was held on the campus of the University of British Columbia, during which five professors from various departments spoke out against Kennedy’s actions. The student newspaper reported that about 5,000 individuals attended, jamming the student area called the Cairn to hear them speak. The mood was nervous, the Ubyssey reported, as “students clustered

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in groups and joked nervously of ‘making the best of it before the bomb.’” 93 While the 
*Calgary Herald* reported that the students gave the professors a mixed opinion, 94 the 
*Vancouver Sun* noted that the professors were encouraged by the largely supportive 
crowd. “The professors were applauded when they said the U.S. had no right to bring the 
world to the brink of war over Cuba and applauded again when they said the problem 
should be resolved through peaceful negotiation rather than armed intervention.” In fact, 
some students who took the microphone after the professors’ speeches attempted to voice 
support of the American position were reportedly “booed and jeered.” The professors 
condemned the U.S. action as an excuse to target Cuba, arguing that it had nothing to do 
with the missiles. They believed that the Soviet Union had shown restraint despite 
Kennedy’s warlike action, and that the biggest travesty was that the individual citizen 
could do nothing to prevent war from breaking out. Dr. Norman Epstein in particular 
noted that “we are all threatened with being blown off the map, but we have no say in the 
decision.” 95

The UBC gathering was the biggest, but it certainly was not the only protest on 
Wednesday. In Montreal, a pro-American group about 700 strong “demonstrated 
enthusiastically” in front of the Cuban Consul’s office. While this large group was 
enthusiastic and the police were present, presumably for crowd control, only one 
individual was arrested. 96 A much smaller group of students from Carleton University in 
Ottawa marched on Parliament hill as well. These students were from the Combined

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Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CUCND), and the *Ottawa Citizen* reported that their intention was to protest Canada’s acquisition of nuclear weapons.97 In general, public opinion in Canada during the Cuban missile crisis was not decidedly pro-Kennedy, or pro-Cuban. In fact, protests across the country were divergent. Different points of view were expressed by a range of different groups.

On Wednesday night, Howard Green appeared on CBC in an interview with Norman Depoe and Charles Lynch. He attempted to calm fears and quell growing criticism that the Canadian government had not yet taken an official position. The first question was on everyone’s mind: “Mr. Green, what is Canada’s policy in this crisis? Are we backing the United States all the way?”98 He responded,

> Canada has always stood by her friends and of course Americans are our friends and we are standing by them. Mind you, President Kennedy had to make a very difficult decision when he was faced with finding out suddenly that the Soviet Union was installing offensive missile bases in Cuba. I don’t know what history will say about his action but the action has been taken now. I think the important fact is what’s done from now on.99

The interviewers were not satisfied with this response and continue to press him. They noted that other nations of the hemisphere had firmly committed to supporting the American action, and asked again, “…are we behind the quarantine of Cuba?” Rather than answering the question, Green discussed the OAS, and argued they had not gone further than Canada in supporting the U.S. The interviewer then noted that Canada had not broken off trade with Cuba. They also discussed the legality of the quarantine. Green insisted that the government’s biggest concern was “trying to keep the Canadian

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98 Text of a Television Interview with the Secretary of State for External Affairs on the CBC, October 22, 1962, LAC, Howard Charles Green Fonds, MG 32 B13 Vol., 12, File 45.
99 Ibid.
people and the people of Ottawa from getting all excited about this business and from
panicking. I think it’s essential that Canada should show some steadiness in this whole
situation and that’s what is being done.” Implying that Lynch and Depoe were trying to
make newspaper headlines, he tried to maintain calm by emphasizing the need to avoid
speculation. The interview then veered to the issue of consultation, about which the
interviewers knew Diefenbaker was very concerned. They also asked about
Diefenbaker’s suggestion of a neutral UN inspection committee, as well as Canadian
membership in the OAS. Green refused to comment on whether or not he thought the
American action was overly hasty and whether he would have preferred to take the whole
matter to the United Nations first. The interviewers pressed Green to state exactly how
bad he thought the situation was. All he could say was that it was “very grave.”

Another day had passed and the Soviets and Americans had not launched nuclear
weapons. It was increasingly looking as though Kennedy was a brave young leader who
called the bluff of a bully. Diefenbaker, by not supporting the United States, was coming
under fire for not supporting an ally in their time of need.

Thursday, 25 October – Sunday, 28 October

Criticism grew on Thursday as former President Harry S. Truman went on the
record to condemn Canada’s “attitude.” In a speech at a press conference in
Independence, Missouri, he said “the Latin American countries have made a stand and

\[100\] Ibid.
our position is strengthened in these countries and that part of the world...And that is another reason I don’t like the stand Canada has taken.”

Diefenbaker could delay no longer, and finally went on the record in support of the United States’ action. Despite the fact that it was more or less too late, as some of the Russian ships had already turned back, on 25 October, Diefenbaker stood up in the House of Commons and supported the American position. He agreed with President Kennedy that “the Soviet Union by its action has reached out across the Atlantic to challenge the right of free men to live in peace in this hemisphere.” He noted that “Canadians are in general agreement that these offensive weapons, located so contiguously to our continent are a direct and immediate menace to Canada.” While he insisted on drawing attention to the fact that Canada was merely “informed...some few hours before President Kennedy made his announcement,” he nevertheless wished to made his position clear: “So that the attitude of the government will be clearly understood – and again I am asking for the support of the house as a whole in this connection – we intend to support the United States and our other allies in this situation.”

Diefenbaker’s support of the American position was noted and applauded by newspapers and Canadians around the country, but for many, it was too little, too late. Even his own party had started to criticize his actions. The Young Progressive Conservative Association of Manitoba, for instance, sent a telegram to Diefenbaker

expressing their dislike of his “wishy-washy” position. Press reaction was more favorable once Diefenbaker finally made it clear that “the government has overcome any doubts.” Of course, it did not hurt Diefenbaker’s public image that the navy had already stepped up preparedness and begun to do exercises off the coast of Halifax (although the extent to which they did so with Diefenbaker’s approval was limited). However, this by no means meant that Diefenbaker was off the hook.

Protest against Kennedy’s actions and the danger of the situation also continued. Probably unaware of Diefenbaker’s statement in support of the United States, Social Credit leader Robert N. Thompson made a speech to the Men’s Association of St. John’s Anglican Church on Thursday night. He claimed that neutrality was worse than communism. “The great tragedy was that so many Canadians preferred to remain neutral on so many issues.” Meanwhile, in Saskatoon, students at the University of Saskatchewan reportedly abandoned their studies since there was no point in completing assignments that were due mid-November if nuclear war broke out. Professors dropped their regular lectures to discuss the Cuban situation. Many students skipped classes to attend protests by local ban-the-bomb groups. Picketers in Calgary continued to march in front of the U.S. Consulate, although one newspaper story insinuated that they had been paid to do so. One person interviewed in the story apparently said that he was “just doing a job.”

106 “Neutrality is worse than Communism – Thompson,” Ottawa Citizen, 26 October 1962, p. 5.
107 “Campus Activities Forgotten as Students, Profs Focus Attention on Showdown in Cuban Situation,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 25 October 1962, p. 3.
Civil defence planning also received significant attention from the government and press. Part of the reason for Diefenbaker’s hesitation earlier in the week was that he did not want to create a panic or a rush on stores for canned goods and emergency supplies. On Tuesday, Bryce sent Diefenbaker a memo on the state of the civil authorities’ ability to handle a crisis. He asked Diefenbaker to discuss with Cabinet the possibility of allowing Bryce to prepare for the worst. He wanted departments to have a warning officer available at all times, and for key personnel to stay in Ottawa and keep the Emergency Measures Organization (EMO) informed as to who would be available on short notice. He thought these limited steps could be taken without causing a general panic.109 This did not officially put these departments on alert (which would have been roughly akin to putting the military on official alert and likely would have caused general panic). In his speech on Thursday, Diefenbaker outlined the steps that had been taken to prepare the country, and readying these departments was one of them. In addition to controlling Soviet aircraft bound for Cuba through Canada, and allowing the military to make preparations, Diefenbaker informed the House that “our civilian departments have been instructed as a matter of urgency to bring up to date the measures which they would need to take in any emergency.”110

While some Canadians were frightened and preparing for the worst, others were more pragmatic, believing that if nuclear war broke out, there was little they could do. Some people did stock up on canned goods and batteries, as we saw in Anita’s testimony in the beginning of this chapter. However, there is no evidence that this was a widespread

109 DCC, Vol. 56 File MG 01/XII/C/120 Cuba, Memorandum for the Prime Minister from R.B.B., Re: Civil state of readiness to deal with an emergency, October 23rd, 1962.
trend. In fact, newspapers reported that the mood was one of apprehensive calm. In Vancouver, many stores reported that there was no sudden, panicked rush by people who wanted to stockpile supplies. Neither had there been a rush to sign up at local military recruitment centers. The mood was strangely joking. The story concluded on the fatalistic note that “many people seem to think that if they have to die they must as well go out laughing.”

Edmonton was also reported to be calm, though a newspaper story there did note that people believed they needed to buy groceries and prepare for nuclear war. Ottawa also remained calm. Despite increased requests for civil defence pamphlets and an increased volume of phone inquiries, the local EMO reported that the mood was not one of panic.

Civil defence organizations made it clear through several newspaper stories across the country that no official alert had been ordered. Spokespeople for the EMO said that despite having more staff on hand and in many cases being open twenty-four hours a day, there was no official alert. The Minister in charge of civil defence in Nova Scotia, for instance, told the newspaper that in spite of increased interest in civil defence, there had been no official word from Ottawa to raise the alert level. Ottawa, Winnipeg, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and Edmonton civil defence offices reported the same.

Andrew Burch has shown how, during the missile crisis, civil defence failed to offer any real protection for the nation’s citizens. “During the Cuban crisis, the system of passive defences was partially mobilized, but its response across the country was decidedly

111 “City Faces Crisis Calmly; No Rush to Stockpile Food,” *Vancouver Sun*, 24 October 1962, p. 2.
115 See *Ottawa Citizen*, 24 October 1962, p. 1; *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 October 1962, p. 3; *Regina Leader-Post* 25 October 1962, p. 3; *St Johns Evening Telegram*, 26 October 1962, p. 3; and *Edmonton Journal* 27 October 1962, p. 51, respectively.
uneven, and marked by confusion, ill-preparedness, and lack of co-ordination. Despite over a decade of civil defence publicity and exercises, in most cases the ‘responsible citizenry’ had no conception of what they were supposed to do to escape immediate or lingering death from blast and radiation.”

School boards also prepared for the worst. School defence plans had always been a central concern of civil defence authorities, because of parents demanding answers as to what would happen should a nuclear alert go out while their children were at school. Children would be sent home if there was enough time, and basic civil defence manoeuvres would be executed in the event of an immediate attack. During the Cuban missile crisis, however, there was increased discussion of these plans and some schools took another look at their evacuation plans. Toronto public schools even placed transistor radios in classrooms, so that principals could maintain contact with civil defence authorities after an attack. Once that decision was made public, many other school boards discussed doing the same, though it is not clear whether they followed through. The Halifax school board, for example, discussed supplying transistor radios, but ultimately decided against it. School boards in Vancouver considered radios as well, though what the final decision in the latter case was not reported. They did, however, re-evaluate their evacuation plans. In many cases, letters went home to parents during the week of the crisis, outlining the plan and reassuring them their children would be looked after if they were forced to remain at school.

116 Burtch, “If We Are Attacked,” p. 341.
Friday was another tense day as Castro announced that his anti-aircraft forces would shoot down reconnaissance planes over Cuban airspace starting the following morning. Castro was beginning to realize that the situation might not turn out in his favor, since some Russian ships had already turned back. In Canada, discontent with Diefenbaker’s leadership grew as journalist Charles Lynch published another story that ran in newspapers across the country (in most cases on the front page), asking whether Diefenbaker was “sluggish or statesmanlike.” The implication was the former. Protestors continued on Friday, though their actions took a raucous turn. Perhaps growing accustomed to living in fear, or perhaps simply tired of the crisis, students across the country took to protesting in their own way. In Winnipeg, a group of fifty or so students started heckling and disturbing a “communist sponsored” talk on Cuba. Turning the lights off and on and shouting from their seats in the auditorium, they refused to quiet down until a student representative told them to either settle down or leave. In Vancouver, a group of engineers from the University of British Columbia took to the streets. They marched “Fidel Castro” to the steps of the city courthouse, where he would be tried and executed for his crimes. Played by a twenty-year-old Chilean born student, Castro’s crimes were, “being responsible for many protests and counter protests; not mentioning UBC engineers in his rally speeches; changing the weather in North America by introducing hot air masses; double parking his ICBM on Granville;” and “throwing a cigar wrapper on the street in violation of the city’s anti-litter bylaw.” The students

120 Munton and Welch, Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 74.
121 Ibid., p. 70.
found him guilty of these crimes, and gleefully executed him with water pistols. Police officers, present at the scene from the beginning, did not step in and break up the crowd until the students started to set off firecrackers.125 One student said that it was a “protest against protestors protesting protestations.”126

Saturday was the last day of the public phase of the crisis, although it was also arguably the closest the world came to actually witnessing a “hot” nuclear war. Fair Play for Cuba Committee-led groups in Winnipeg continued to protest in front of the U.S. Consulate-General’s office.127 Tension sky rocketed after Castro’s anti-aircraft forces shot down an American U-2 plane over Cuba. This incident made the threat of retaliation imminent, but cooler heads finally prevailed. The night before Kennedy had received a long and rambling telegram from Khrushchev with conciliatory overtones. On Saturday morning, however, another message was received, which proposed a different scenario that was unacceptable to the United States: it re-iterated that the missiles in Cuba were defensive, and insisted that the missiles in Turkey had to be removed. The second telegram raised doubts as to whether Khrushchev was still in power. The ExComm debated, but decided to take a gamble. They decided to send a message to the Soviets accepting the terms of the first telegram and ignoring the second one. The tactic worked. Early on Sunday morning, the Kremlin broadcast a message over the radio that they accepted Kennedy’s terms and would remove the missiles.128 Kennedy also promised

127 “Fair Play for All Police Insist on Co-existence;” Winnipeg Free Press, 29 October 1962, p. 3.
128 See Munton and Welch, Cuban Missile Crisis, p. 78 for a discussion of what became known as the “Trollope Ploy.”
Khrushchev that the missiles in Turkey would soon be removed, but this deal was kept secret.

On Saturday, the *Washington Post* published an editorial that recognized the danger of the situation through which the world had passed. It noted that at least the crisis had demonstrated that America’s allies, including Canada, could be counted upon. This editorial is an enigma, because it commended Diefenbaker for his immediate and unconditional support during the crisis. Canada, it noted, not only complied with American policy, but actually implemented the blockade against sending offensive weapons to Cuba even earlier than the United States. The editorial cited Diefenbaker’s Thursday speech, and concluded “it is deeply reassuring that no cool air is blowing from Canada.”

 Either the author was trying to convey a certain message or they were completely unaware of the domestic fallout from Diefenbaker’s lack of support, but either way, Diefenbaker certainly saw the editorial and possibly even agreed with it.

 Although there was still potential for trouble, as Castro was reportedly angry with Khrushchev for what he saw as a betrayal, the overall feeling in Canada was cautious relief. Also on Sunday, Diefenbaker made a speech intended to reassure Canadians.

“Mankind will breathe more hopefully now that there is an early prospect that the threat to the Western Hemisphere from long-range Soviet missiles in Cuba will be removed.” This was the result of “the high degree of unity, understanding and cooperation among the Western allies. In this the Canadian Government has played its full part.”

Diefenbaker insisted that Canada did more than most to help ease tensions, and expressed his hope that the successful resolution of this crisis would result in further agreements

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between East and West, as well as steps toward disarmament. The acute phase of the crisis was over.

The Aftermath

In the days and weeks following the crisis, Canadians felt keenly some of the longer term issues provoked by this episode. One of the most predominant feelings was fear that Khrushchev did not give up so easily for nothing, and that he must have something up his sleeve, which would perhaps have repercussions in Berlin. Though Khrushchev did get something – removal of the missile bases in Turkey – this was not publicly known. A headline in the Ottawa Citizen asked what was next:

“Hungary…Berlin…Cuba – weary world awaits next move!”

Perhaps this feeling of caution was augmented by the fact that Castro, feeling betrayed by those he thought were allies, continued to agitate against the delicate peace. In a meeting with U Thant, Castro refused to allow on-site inspections from a UN team to verify that the missiles had been dismantled. Eventually, Khrushchev simply stopped consulting with him, and the missiles were removed from Cuba.

In Canada, the immediate aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis was characterized by continued concern about the state of civil defence preparedness in the country. The EMO was criticized for not making civil defence information more readily available to the public. Despite the fact that their pamphlets had been available to anyone who asked for years, one editorial in the Calgary Herald requested that an easy reference sheet, in a

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form that could be hung on a refrigerator, be distributed to every Canadian household.\textsuperscript{132}

The Toronto branch of the Emergency Measures Organization was also criticized in a piece published in the \textit{Globe and Mail}. Co-ordination between the EMO, the government and the general public during the Cuban missile crisis was poor, the article claimed, and the EMO in particular hesitated because it was uncertain of its role during a national crisis.\textsuperscript{133} Another newspaper story claimed that more than $50 million was spent to prepare the country for an atomic attack, but “Canadians are still sitting ducks.”\textsuperscript{134}

While civil defence received a lot of press attention and reminded the country that if a nuclear attack were to happen, many people would die from simply lack of preparation, another group was determined to stop this from happening by encouraging disarmament. The Voice of Women (VOW), which had been active throughout the crisis protesting and sending Diefenbaker telegrams, organized a mass trip to Ottawa in order to lodge a complaint in person. Approximately three hundred women joined this trek and on 1 November they met with Green and asked him to reassure them that Canada was committed to world disarmament. Québec activist Therese F. Casgrain “presented a brief on behalf of the organization, urging no nuclear arms for Canada or Canadians at any time or in any place, and asking modification of any international agreements ‘which automatically involve this country in an armed conflict between nuclear powers.’”\textsuperscript{135}

The VOW were not alone in their desire for disarmament, and Green more than likely sympathized with their cause, given his attempts in the past to keep nuclear

\textsuperscript{133} “Co-ordination Poor in Crisis, Allen Says,” \textit{Globe and Mail} 10 November 1962, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{134} “$50 million spent to meet an A-attack but Canadians are still sitting ducks,” \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, 27 October 1962, p. 7.
weapons from Canadian soil. Diefenbaker also voiced support for disarmament initiatives on several occasions, but his record with nuclear weapons was complicated by continental defence issues, the cancelling of the Avro Arrow program, and the internal dynamics of his Cabinet. This is an issue that will be discussed in much more detail, but the successful diplomatic resolution of the Cuban missile crisis strengthened his resolve to keep nuclear weapons out of Canada. On Monday, 5 November, he gave a speech at the Diamond Jubilee Convention Banquet of the Zionist Organization of Canada, discussing, among other things, Canada’s role in the crisis. He reiterated that there was never any doubt that Canada backed its allies, and he also renewed the possibility of disarmament. He insisted yet again “the necessity of there being full consultation before any action taken or policies executed that might lead to war.” After all:

One of the major sources of instability and crisis has been and remains the reliance which is placed upon a precarious balance of armed force. The events of recent days have shown that the security of the free world depends on its preparedness and willingness to react firmly to threats, but there can be no long-term security in a balance which can be quickly and menacingly upset. A fundamental conclusion which must be drawn from the Soviet actions which precipitated this crisis is that if the future of mankind is to be preserved then the uneasy equilibrium of armed force which now prevails must be replaced by international settlements which will give reasonable assurance of a stable peace.136

He believed the United Nations must be utilized to negotiate such an agreement.137 Diefenbaker was not the only leader calling for reduction of tension and disarmament in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis. Leaders in the United States and Soviet Union agreed, and began working towards a Limited Test Ban Treaty which was finally ratified in 1963.

137 Ibid.
Conclusion

The Cuban missile crisis was over, but within a few months Pearson and the Liberals defeated Diefenbaker’s government. Criticism that was exacerbated by the missile crisis ultimately brought down Diefenbaker’s Conservative government. What can be said of the experience as a whole for Canada? Clearly, the country was split. It gave groups ideologically on the left more publicity, as they demanded that nuclear weapons be kept from Canadian soil. At the same time, some voiced strong disapproval for Kennedy’s actions, believing that he ought to be tried for war crimes. Still others believed that Kennedy and the American position had to be supported at all costs, to avoid threat of nuclear war, and to prevent Soviet and communist incursions in the western hemisphere, starting with Cuba. There were also those who believed that the Canadian-Cuban relationship was unique and a vital marker of Canadian independence and foreign affairs. Strident Cold Warriors who believed that Castro was a Communist leader and that his revolutionary government in the Western hemisphere was insufferable. The range of public debate on the Canadian-Cuban relationship is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three – “Good Friends of Canada?” Canadian Understandings of Cuba

On Thursday 25 October, at the height of the missile crisis, the Cuban ambassador to Canada, Dr. Americo Cruz, held a press conference. He wanted to tell reporters the Cuban side of the story. Asked if there really were missiles in Cuba, Cruz confirmed that there were, but reassured reporters that they were fully under Cuban control. He stressed the egregious nature of the American action, and that all Cuba wanted was proof that the United States would not invade the island or continue to support counterrevolutionary forces in Miami. He confirmed that relations between Canada and Cuba were as good as they had ever been. “Far too much emphasis has been placed on the threat posed to Canada…‘We don’t have anything against Canada. We are good friends of Canada.”

Cruz dodged questions on the official state of relations between the two countries, however. Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s Thursday speech, in which he voiced full support for the American position, “answered the question.” The message to Canadians was that Cuba was not going to launch missiles at Canada, but neither were they particularly pleased with Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s sudden support for the American embargo.

Stories covering Cruz’s press conference appeared in almost every major daily newspaper during the crisis. They all carried more or less the same message: yes, Cuba

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had missiles, but they were defensive, not offensive. Canada was not threatened. There was ambiguity about official Canadian-Cuban relations, but overall, Canada enjoyed much more cordial relations with Cuba than did the United States. However, different reporters added individual detail. For example, in his version of the press conference, Bruce Phillips described Ambassador Cruz as “drawing fiercely on a ripe Havana stogie.”

He also told an anecdote about the ambassador’s attempt to make an opening statement, but reporters harassed him with questions until he petulantly demanded they stop and let him finish. The Ambassador blamed the scuffle on the (American) United Press International (UPI) reporter, as “they are ‘always doing bad things to us,’” even though the reporter actually firing questions was Joe Scanlon from the *Toronto Daily Star.*

This story illustrates a frustrated, temperamental, and of course, cigar-smoking ambassador, a stereotype of Cuban masculinity common in the North American imagination of Cuba as a place of pleasure, indulgence and tropical escape. Louis A. Pérez has shown how, through the twentieth century, the Cuba that North Americans knew was a manufactured entity, invented by North Americans for North American consumption. As he puts it, “they found in Cuba the perfect Other: foreign but familiar, exotic but civilized, primitive but modern, a tropical escape only hours from home in which to flout conventions, a place to live dangerously but without taking risks.”

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3 Ibid.
5 Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), p. 194. Pérez also notes that this North American construction of Cuba was self-serving and contemptuous: “North Americans could presume sufficient familiarity with Cuba and Cubans to obtain images for their music, their films, their fiction, and then proceed to make a totality of that fragment of the Cuban reality that they themselves had created. They insisted on dealing only with the image of their creation. Cuba was not to be taken seriously. It was exotic and very tropical, a place for fun, adventure, and abandon. It was a background for honeymoons, a playground for vacations, a brother, a
North American image of Cuban masculinity was fuelled as much by Ricky Ricardo (Desi Arnaz in the popular television show *I Love Lucy*) as by images of Fidel Castro.

Another example of minor but important interpretational difference is seen in the version, or rather versions, of the story published in the *Vancouver Sun*. The story first appeared accompanied by a photograph of a calm, collected, smiling, and otherwise unremarkable Ambassador Cruz. When the story ran again in the final edition, the column immediately to the left was no longer filled with other news items, but rather with a cartoon (see figure 3.1). This cartoon depicted a man with ragged clothes, a sidearm, a bandolier and shotgun slung over his shoulder, overgrown, unkempt hair and – most symbolic – beard, with a slightly crazed look in his eyes. The original photograph of Cruz still accompanied the story, but the cartoon was captioned: “Don’ worry señor. Cubans control the missiles…not Russians.” 6 This image belied the calm of the photograph. Even though the story itself was unchanged, the overall message was remarkably different and spoke volumes about perceptions of Cubans in North America.

The press conference and the coverage it received in Canadian newspapers during the missile crisis illustrate some important themes. First, it shows that Cuban representatives were not silent during the crisis. This perhaps seems self-evident, but many academic histories of the Cuban missile crisis are silent about Cuba. Second, and more important for the purposes of this study, the press conference and resulting coverage demonstrates how varied were perceptions of Cuba. The ambassador received...
sympathetic coverage in some newspapers, objective coverage in others, and in still others, highly suspect, stereotypical coverage. This is a reflection of the Canadian population at the time, whose views ranged all over the spectrum. The variety of interpretations of the same press conference demonstrates that the Canadian understanding of Cuba, the presence of the missiles, and their long-term implications were not a coherent whole.

This chapter discusses the ways in which Canadians understood Cuba and the Canadian-Cuban relationship during the crisis. How did previous understandings of such important issues as trade between Canada and Cuba change? Why, during an international nuclear crisis, did Canadian membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) reappear in public debate? How did beliefs and misconceptions surrounding Cuba and Cubans, and in particular Castro, shape Canadian public opinion about Cuba during the crisis? Where do Cuban solidarity groups and leftist supporters, such as the Canadian Communist Party and the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), fit into the story? These are the questions that this chapter explores.

After a brief background section on the history of the relationship between Canada and revolutionary Cuba, this chapter discusses the manner in which Castro and Cuba were understood in Canadian public discourse before the Cuban missile crisis, and how these ideas manifested during the crisis. I will then examine two case studies that encapsulate a range of public opinion about Cuba: Canadian membership in the OAS and trade between Canada and Cuba. Finally, I will examine support for Cuba from different groups such as the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) and the Canadian-Cuban Friendship Committee (CCFC) and their actions during the crisis. Overall, I will show
that the idea of Cuba was something in which many Canadians were profoundly interested, whether or not the “Cuba” that people imagined was an accurate reflection of the country itself, or of preconceived notions. They were keenly interested in what this crisis meant for the relationship between Canada and Cuba, and, by extension, Canada’s place in the world.

Canada and (Revolutionary) Cuba: A Short History

The history of the relationship between Canada and Cuba is long, complicated and can be only briefly summarized here.7 Some authors have traced the relationship between Canada and Cuba, as well as Latin America more generally, to the late nineteenth century, through the beginning of the Pan American Union (PAU; and the precursor to the OAS), as well as through colonial trade relationships between Britain and the West Indies.8 While this certainly is true, the diplomatic and commercial relationship between the two countries was not unique or particularly important to the foreign policy of either country until the 1950s. The most interesting part of the story of Canadian-

8 See Peter McKenna, Canada and the OAS: From Dilettante to Full Partner (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1995), chapter one, and Rochlin, Discovering the Americas, chapter one.
Cuban relations begins with Batista, opposition against him, and his eventual fall to the rebel leader Fidel Castro.

Cuba’s history is one marked by war, colonial oppression, and American domination. The history of revolutionary Cuba is also an underdog story. Fidel Castro came to power through revolution, tired of the oppression and corruption in Fulgencio Batista’s regime. His rise to power began with the failed raid on the Moncada Barracks on 26 July 1953, after which he and his people, as well as a number of innocent bystanders, were arrested. During their trial, he defended himself and the others with a speech that would later became famous, in which he declared that while the Batista regime could condemn him, history would absolve him. Imprisoned nevertheless, he was given amnesty and released in May 1955. He then travelled to Mexico, where he met other revolutionaries such as Ernesto “Che” Guevara and gathered support for what would soon become the well-known 26 July Movement. Castro finally returned to Cuba with a group of revolutionaries after a difficult trip across the Gulf of Mexico in December 1956. Forced to flee when the expected coordinated insurrection in Santiago did not materialize as planned, they made for the Sierra Maestra mountains, which became their home base, and began harassing Batista’s troops and gaining support throughout the countryside. Eventually, they made their way to Havana, and Batista, realizing his end was near, fled the country. This cleared the way for Fidel’s revolution to take the city on New Year’s Eve, 1959.

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9 The history of Cuba is another extremely complicated topic on which many have written excellent analyses. See for analyses of Latin America and the Cold War more generally, Grandin, Latin America and the Cold War and Empire’s Workshop; Joseph and Spenser, eds., In From the Cold and Prashad, The Darker Nations. For histories of Cuba in particular, see Leslie Bethel, ed., Cuba: A Short History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Richard Gott, Cuba: A New History (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004) and of course, Pérez, On Becoming Cuban.

10 Gott, Cuba, pp. 147-152 for a far more detailed history of the Moncada attack.
Despite the extreme dislike for Castro with which most Americans are now familiar, the rebel leader was initially viewed in a fairly positive, or at the very least neutral, manner. Historian Robert Wright has analyzed the favorable response that the North American press gave the rebel leader. Even in the early days, Castro was extremely aware of “the political value of international sympathy.” An series of articles by Herbert J. Matthews of the New York Times presented a sympathetic and romantic portrayal of the rebels and was responsible for much of the early positive response they received in North America. Wright notes that in the wake of this interview, Castro became “a media darling.” He became even more admired by the Canadian public after some Canadian and American hostages were taken in Cuba. When released, one of the Canadians gave a press conference detailing the excellent treatment received at the hands of the rebels, drawing a stark contrast between Castro and the ever more demonized Batista.

After the January revolution, there was no immediate reaction against Castro’s government. The United States formally recognized the new government on January 7, and Canada followed suit the next day. There were some indications that Castro had a ruthless side, such as the show trials of many of Batista’s officials and their subsequent imprisonment and executions, as well as the immediate suppression of any whispers of a counter-revolution. But there was no single moment when the American attitude towards Castro began to turn radically negative. Rather, a number of events accumulated. The

11 Wright, Three Nights, p. 41.
12 Ibid., p. 42.
show trials of Batista’s men certainly went a long way towards turning President Eisenhower against Castro, and the nationalization of American companies concerned the United States still more. Which specific initiative made positive American-Cuban relations impossible is arguable. By April 1959, when Castro toured North America, President Eisenhower decided to go golfing rather than meet with him, and let the Cuban leader meet with his Vice-President, Richard Nixon, instead.\(^{14}\) Alan McPherson has examined this trip in order to assess what, if any, success Castro’s brand of “populist democracy” had on strengthening relations between Cuba and Canada, and Cuba and the United States. He concludes that the April 1959 trip was a failure in that regard, since the trip was both a symptom and cause of hardening relations between the United States and Cuba.\(^{15}\)

From the public relations perspective, however, it is generally agreed that Castro’s April 1959 trip to North America was a success. Although the majority of his time was spent in the United States (he was in Montreal for less than a day), Wright points out, “his presence galvanized the special kinship many Canadians had come to feel for him and his ragtag band of \textit{barbudos} (bearded ones).\(^{16}\) Lana Wylie has argued in her recent work, \textit{Perceptions of Cuba}, that it was about this time that Canadian and American opinions of Castro began to diverge.\(^{17}\) A series of events followed Castro’s April 1959 trip that would soon solidify increasing American disapproval. For instance, in July 1960 Eisenhower enacted a significant cut to American sugar imports from Cuba, which in turn

\(^{16}\) Wright, \textit{Three Nights}, p. 23.
\(^{17}\) Wylie, \textit{Perceptions of Cuba}. 

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had an enormous impact on the Cuban economy. In retaliation, a month later, Castro nationalized American companies in Cuba. Then, in October, the United States imposed a partial embargo on Cuba, with only food and medicine exempt. The American-Cuban relationship had significantly deteriorated.

But what of the Canadian relationship with Cuba? There has been a great deal of discussion about the unbroken diplomatic and trade relationship between these two countries, as well as over the extent to which the Americans were either displeased by or responsible for continued relations.\textsuperscript{18} The American government was not opposed to Canada maintaining trade relations with Cuba, especially if that meant that Cuba was not completely isolated and forced into the willing arms of the Soviet Union, so long as strategic goods (for example, materials that could be used in a war such as guns, ammunition, tanks, planes, etc.) were not among the goods traded.\textsuperscript{19} Diefenbaker, ever the populist politician, was not interested in acting against Canadian public opinion. Despite some criticism of selling goods to a communist country, there was significant support for keeping Cuba in the western camp of the Cold War as much as possible. For that reason, Diefenbaker’s continued trade policy with Cuba received support from many Canadians.\textsuperscript{20} As Jason Zorbas has recently shown, Diefenbaker was primarily interested in acting in what he believed were Canada’s best interests.\textsuperscript{21} He was not interested in defying the United States just for the sake of defiance, nor was he trying to distinguish

\textsuperscript{18} See note 231 for various histories of the Canadian-Cuban relationship. See Wright, \textit{Three Nights}, p.65 for a discussion of the extent of American influence over Canadian foreign policy regarding Cuba. See also Dennis Molinaro, “Calculated Diplomacy” in Wright and Wylie, \textit{Our Place in the Sun}, pp. 75-95.
\textsuperscript{19} Robert Wright notes that “far from encouraging Canada to support the embargo, the United States secretly urged Diefenbaker to maintain normal relations because it was thought that Canada would be well positioned to gather intelligence on the island” (p. 65).
\textsuperscript{20} Wright, \textit{Three Nights}, pp. 65-68.
himself from his liberal predecessors, per se. As Zorbas points out, his policy of promoting Canadian trade and policy in Latin America were a continuation of policy from the St. Laurent years.\textsuperscript{22} Simply put, “Canada had little reason to join the [American] boycott as the Cuban government did not nationalist or appropriate Canadian companies.”\textsuperscript{23} He was acting in the manner that he thought would best diversify trade away from, without deliberately provoking, the United States.

Increased American displeasure with Castro became obvious in the April 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. Sometimes called a fiasco, and sometimes an act of war, President Kennedy gave the go-ahead for the plan created by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to train and equip a force of Cuban exiles and help launch them into Cuba at Playa Girón to make their way into Havana and overthrow Castro. Another reason for this invasion was the blooming relationship between Castro and the Soviet bloc, and a growing suspicion that Castro’s government was, in fact, Communist. That, only ninety miles off the coast of Florida, could not be tolerated. Unfortunately for Kennedy, there were a number of problems with the plan. The proposed landing site had a number of strategic issues, and was too far from the area in which they were supposed to take cover. In addition, even if they breached the beachhead, there were miles of swampy terrain to navigate. Assuming they made it past these initial obstacles, there was also the problem of how entrenched Castro’s revolution had become by this point. The plan was contingent upon the people of Cuba welcoming the invaders and joining them to overthrow Castro’s regime. Whether or not this would have happened is, many scholars

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 2.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 7.
recognize, questionable at best.\textsuperscript{24} The invasion ultimately failed. Some invaders were captured by Castro’s forces, others escaped. The biggest casualty of the Bay of Pigs, however, was Kennedy’s reputation. Only a few months in office at this point, it was an enormous public relations fiasco. With the rhetoric of the New Frontier and Cold War anti-communism, Kennedy had painted himself into a corner which necessitated a tough stance towards Castro. The failed invasion had merely strengthened anti-Americanism in Cuba and tarnished Kennedy’s image to the rest of the world.

The Canadian reaction to the Bay of Pigs was mixed. As Lana Wylie has shown, while there was some support for the American position, some Canadians looked more sympathetically at the Cuban side of the story, since Canada is also a small nation dominated by the American behemoth.\textsuperscript{25} Examining diplomatic dispatches from the early years of the revolution, Don Munton and David Vogt have shown that the Bay of Pigs attack was neither a surprise to Canadian diplomats in Cuba, nor to the Cuban authorities. The easy defeat of the invaders was predicted. As a result, rather than overthrowing Castro’s regime, as the American government had intended, the invasion solidified his power.\textsuperscript{26} According to Robert Wright, public opinion in Canada was “almost uniformly unsympathetic to Kennedy in the wake of the Bay of Pigs” in part because the safety of Canadians in Cuba was secured by Castro’s government, and in part because Canada was skeptical of American motives. As a result, “many Canadians therefore concluded that

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{24} There are many histories of the Bay of Pigs invasion from various perspectives (Cuban, Miami, American public, U.S. government and so on), but see for example Jones, \textit{The Bay of Pigs}. There is also a good discussion of reaction to the invasion in Gosse, \textit{Where the Boys Are}.
\item\textsuperscript{25} Wylie, \textit{Perceptions of Cuba}, p. 76.
\item\textsuperscript{26} Don Munton and David Vogt, “Inside Castro’s Cuba: The Revolution and Canada’s Embassy in Havana,” in \textit{Our Place in the Sun}, eds. Wright and Wylie, pp. 56-7.
\end{itemize}
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the Bay of Pigs was just another episode in the schoolyard scrap between Washington and Havana, with the United States in the role of the bully.”

Canada’s position on Cuba in this period remained more or less the same. Diplomatic ties were maintained, as was trade of non-strategic goods. As for Canada’s relationship with the United States, relations were much friendlier in the Eisenhower era than the Kennedy era. Many scholars have noted the tension that characterized the Kennedy-Diefenbaker relationship. While the relationship between the two was complex, Cuba and Latin America became a significant point of tension. During President Kennedy’s first official trip to Canada, for example, he stressed the importance of Canadian membership in the Organization of American States (OAS), among other things, which did not sit well with Diefenbaker. The latter, who had been leaning towards joining the organization, pulled back, since the nationalist Diefenbaker believed he could not act at the urging of the American president. By mid-1961, Canadian-American relations were still officially friendly, but the American president disliked Diefenbaker, and the feeling was certainly mutual.

By the time the Cuban missile crisis broke out in October 1962, the stage was set. Canada, through Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s actions, had positioned itself as being neutral towards Cuba, while remaining an American ally. The United States had grown extremely hostile towards Castro and had made several attempts, the Bay of Pigs being the most disastrous and public, to remove him from power. Despite being a strident anti-

28 Nash, *Kennedy and Diefenbaker*.
29 Kennedy’s May 1961 trip to Ottawa was also the occasion on which he accidentally left behind a memo which spoke of “pushing” Canada on certain policy initiatives. Diefenbaker was infuriated by the language in the memo and kept it when he should have returned it without comment. See chapter six for more discussion of this incident.
communist Cold Warrior, Diefenbaker had locked himself into a position of refusing to passively accept American demands. Canada had to make up its own mind regarding Cuba, and Canadians differed on their opinions on what was happening there.

Anti-communism and Anti-Castroism in Canada

The remainder of this chapter examines how Canadians understood and discussed Cuba and Castro during the Cuban missile crisis. This section will look at negative feelings towards Castro and Cuba, who voiced them, what issues seemed to galvanize public opinion and discourse, and what tropes were used in this process.30 This section will explore the pre-crisis period, then the ways in which this discourse manifested during the crisis through political cartoons, letters to the editor of newspapers, and, perhaps unexpectedly, through the actions of a group of engineering students at the University of British Columbia.

On Thursday during the missile crisis, the Edmonton Journal ran a story written by Carlos Todd from the North American Newspaper Alliance from Miami, Florida. It reported that the consensus in Miami was that American intervention in Cuba and the ouster of Castro’s regime would be widely popular and “bring an explosion of joy among the population of the island.”31 Apparently, four years of communist tyranny and oppression were enough, and the people of Cuba were waiting for the Americans to come

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30 Often in the following pages Castro and Cuba will be used almost interchangeably. This is not because they are interchangeable, but rather because many of the political cartoons, letters to the editor and editorials used them in that manner. For many people in this time, Castro was the essence of revolutionary Cuba and, when they wanted to stress the communist leanings of the country, they used Cuba in that sense. Other times, Cuba was something that needed to be saved from Castro, which is where the two terms diverge.
and rescue them. Anti-Castro sentiments of exiles from Cuba living in Miami were, and still are, well-known north of the border, and the timing of this particular story is not surprising. There were those during the crisis who sought to remind Canadians that Castro was undoubtedly a communist, and that hesitation in supporting American attempts to have Castro ousted was tantamount to a death sentence for Cubans still on the island.

There were a few Cuban exiles living in Canada and they were, not surprisingly, vociferous in their demands to the Diefenbaker government. Generally, they wanted relations with Castro’s government to be suspended and for Canada to join with the Americans in using any means necessary to get rid of the dictator. For example, in late November 1960, Jesus Mendez wrote to Diefenbaker accusing him of maintaining relations with Cuba only because Castro had not nationalized Canadian banks. He pointed out that, as a refugee from Cuba, he knew exactly how communist the country was becoming under Castro’s rule. As he wrote, “since Fidel Castro took over in Cuba almost two years ago the country has been becoming a Communist State more and more every day until now it can be truly called a Russian satellite.” He went on to beg the Prime Minister to remember that “its future with the American countries is at stake.” Mr. Mendez was not the only former resident of Cuba to ask why Canada was helping Communist Cuba. Another individual writing to the editor of the Calgary Herald in the aftermath of the missile crisis reminded Canadians that this was a democratic country and that continued support of Cuba was criminal:

We consider our nation to be a democratic one. We allow all political parties to exist. Do we allow bandits to rob our banks and criminals to kill our citizens? No. We do all in our power to stop them. Why, then, do we as Canadians not get in line with this policy and deal the same way with the Communists?33

The authors of both these letters use their experiences in Cuba as a way to identify themselves as experts on the subject of Castro’s communism and tyranny.

Anti-Castro feeling was not limited to Cuban residents or exiles. There were elements within Canadian society that disliked Castro because of his alleged communist ties. One letter sent to the Prime Minister, for instance, about Canada’s continued trade relationship with Cuba stressed the link between Castro and the communist world. While this author noted that Canada could, and indeed should, do what was in its own best interests, the Cuban issue was separate and more important. “The Cuban question,” he wrote, “is quite another matter and one that must be viewed as serious…There is little doubt in the minds of most people, including mine, but what the Castro regime is strongly linked with the communist bloc. Anything that Canada does to assist in the growth and expansion of the Castro policies, is in short, helping communism.”34 This was a common sentiment. Those who opposed Castro often did so because he was either communist himself or placed communists in key positions of influence in his government. This was basic Cold War dogma: communists in the western hemisphere could not be tolerated.

Castro was often depicted as dictatorial and tyrannical. Those who believed he was a communist also believed he was single-handedly responsible for all the evils in Cuba. One pamphlet sent in to Prime Minister Diefenbaker is a good example of the role in which Castro was often cast. The pamphlet was written in Spanish but hardly needs

33 Letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 7 November 1962, p. 4.
translation, as the emotions on the faces of the individual cartoon images need no words (see figure 3.2). The cover introduces the subject matter with, “Gracias a Fidel Castro,” and the inside of the pamphlet says, “Tenemos hambre, fusilamientos, terror, secuestro, ateismo.”

Terror is depicted by a man sitting by a ringing phone, with a petrified look on his face. Kidnapping is shown by a woman attempting to prevent a sickle-and-hammer-tattooed arm from stealing a child, probably a reference to the rumors that circulated after the revolution that Cuban children would be sent to the Soviet Union for nefarious reasons. Atheism is depicted as another sickle-and-hammer wearing limb, this time a combat-boot clad foot tromping on a rosary and crucifix. This pamphlet was meant to invoke fear and shame on those who allowed such travesties to be visited upon the Cuban people. It says nothing of the gains the revolution accomplished through literacy campaigns or medical advancements. The blame belonged solely to Fidel Castro. Whoever sent the pamphlet into the Prime Minister did not sign their name, but simply wrote the message: “Is Canada going to go down in History as the one nation that helped the Cuban TERROR, CRIMES, etc?”

Such are some of the negative portrayals of Castro that were readily accessible to the public. During the crisis, Castro was variously depicted as a pawn (sometimes literally as we shall see), a child having a temper-tantrum, a naïve girl, or an unknowable and unpredictable bogeyman. For example, an editorial in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* explored why the Soviets decided to do such a risky thing as put missiles on Cuba. The author queried whether Khrushchev actually thought he could get away with it, or if his

35 “Thanks to Fidel Castro, we have hunger, shootings, terror, kidnapping, atheism.”
alliance with Cuba mandated that the missiles had to be put there. Perhaps, he asked, it
was to stave off an American invasion of the island and give Cuba an insurance policy.
Of course, this author reminded the reader, that would mean the missiles were defensive
rather than offensive, and that Kennedy was lying to the public, so that could not be the
reason. In addition, “it ignores the fact that Castro is the pawn and Khrushchev the
master; that the world has been told and believes that the Soviet Union is able to send its
nuclear bombs to any target without the need of nearby bases, and that Russia has said an
attack on Cuba would be considered an attack on itself. What need of Khrushchev taking
such a risk as placing nuclear missiles where they might be fired by misadventure?”38
This pawn image was activated in the process of attempting to understand why the
missiles were placed in Cuba in the first place.

Another newspaper story that used this metaphor was a background piece on the
island that ran in the Vancouver Sun on 30 October. While the story itself does not
mention the recent crisis or its successful conclusion, it is a history of Cuba, which it calls
“torture rock” for its “troubled” past. Describing the history of the island from
Columbus’ “discovery” in 1492 to Castro, reporter Ian MacDonald writes that Cuba is
“an island in the sun that has spent much of its time on the torture rack of history. In
almost 500 years it has known an almost unbroken chain of war, revolution, riot,
exploitation, intrigue, dictatorship, persecution and crushing poverty in the midst of great
wealth.” He then uses the pawn metaphor: “Cuba has often been the pawn in power
plays between great nations. Its role over the years has far exceeded its size, power or

real importance.” While the Cuban missile crisis is not discussed directly, the timing of this story is such that the recent crisis is implied.

A series of political cartoons in newspapers during the crisis made the exact same point in a more visual way (see figures 3.3 through 3.5). The first (fig. 3.3) depicts a chess game in which Kennedy and Khrushchev are the kings. Castro, a pawn placed in between them, is smaller and looks apprehensive as he awaits the next, red, move. Figure 3.4 shows another type of the same argument. Castro is not literally a pawn in this cartoon, but neither is he in control of his and his country’s own destiny. This cartoon shows an upside down Castro being used as a slingshot by a much larger and ominous looking arm, clad in a suit and shirt with a sickle-and-hammer cufflink. The message here is fairly clear as well. Finally, another cartoon (figure 3.5) shows a fly with wingtips spelling out Cuba, perched rather precariously on top of a button – which the caption tells us is the “panic button” – about to be smashed by an enormous hammer bearing the American flag. Castro and Cuba are one and the same, since the fly is sporting a beard. In this instance, Cuba is vulnerable not to the Soviet Union, but rather to the United States. The conclusion, nevertheless, is the same. In these portrayals of Castro, the message is that he is being used by the superpowers as a tool with which to get at the other side. Some thought he did not have much control over the situation. When Kennedy and Khrushchev made a deal to remove the missiles from Cuba without consulting Castro, they were proved more or less correct.

39 Ian MacDonald, “Cuba – Island of Trouble,” Vancouver Sun, 30 October 1962, p. 3.
41 “Master of His Fate, Captain of His Soul,” Halifax Chronicle Herald, 26 October 1962, p. 4.
Another common way of portraying Castro and Cuba during the crisis was to utilize gendered or youthful images. One example of this was a cartoon that appeared in the *Regina Leader Post* (see figure 3.6). The cartoon shows a woman with a flower in her hair (which says Cuba on it), wearing a dress and heels, sitting in the lap of a military officer. He is clearly Soviet, which is made clear by the star on his cap and the hammer and sickle on his pistol holster. The man and woman have their arms around each other and fairly clear romantic intentions. The woman, Cuba, is glaring at her younger brother sitting next to the couple on the couch, wearing a cap with “Guantanamo” written on the rim, jauntily dressed in a sailor outfit. The caption of the cartoon is “Some day, sis, you’ll thank me for hanging around.” The meaning of this cartoon is apparent on a number of levels. The political message is that Cuba does not know what is best for her and that her younger brother knows better than she does. The military overtones are also obvious: the two military powers are fighting over the so-called prize, Cuba. America’s representative, Guantanamo, is a child. While he is obviously a military sort, he is an innocent military sort, and while smug, he appears cute and innocuous. The overall message is that (gendered) Cuba is powerless to determine her own fate in this situation, and that rather than relying on the Soviet man for her protection, she would do better to keep it within the family, so to speak, and stay close to home.

Cuba is also often portrayed as a child, and children are supposedly less responsible for their own actions and more prone to temper tantrums. Louis A. Pérez Jr.

43 “Some day, Sis, you’ll thank me for hanging around,” *Regina Leader Post*, 25 October 1962, p. 21.
44 Guantanamo, of course refers to the American naval base, Guantanamo Bay (or Gitmo, as it is popularly called in the American news media) in Cuba. Located at the southeastern end of Cuba, it was claimed by the Americans following the Spanish-American war in 1898. During the Cuban missile crisis, one of Castro’s demands was that the Americans vacate Guantanamo. It is still an American base and was used during the war in Afghanistan following the terrorist attacks on 9/11 to detain alleged terrorists.
has shown how Cuba has been represented in American political cartoons, using figures such as women or children to show that Cuba was incapable of self-government. Such depictions reinforced the American sense of moral righteousness which accompanied the expansion of empire. A letter to the editor of the *Vancouver Sun* drew on this oft-used image during the crisis, arguing that “I think it is time for the Cuban people to grow up and stop blaming others, the Americans, for their troubles. It is time they tried to solve their problems without screaming for help from other countries.” The irony of this letter is that Castro’s attempt to fend for himself is what caused him to ask for military support from the Soviet Union in the first place, but the letter concluded by stating that “they have no right to involve us in another world war.” The author simultaneously blames Cuba for causing the crisis and demands it take responsibility for its defence at the same time. The demand to “grow up” and stop blaming others sounds remarkably like an all-knowing parent speaking to a child. Finally, this can also be seen by one final cartoon (see figure 3.7) showing a grown up Castro relegated to wearing a dunce cap adorned with the hammer-and-sickle and words: “N war heads.” The grown-ups sorted out the mess for him and put him in the corner with the cap to think about what he had done.

The last common stereotype used to describe Castro during the crisis was more powerful and frightening than the tropes of pawn, female or child. Sometimes Cuba appeared as an unpredictable entity, capable of anything. This is the trope invoked by the cartoon discussed at the beginning of this chapter in the context of the Cruz press conference. That cartoon (figure 3.1) showed a gun-toting, bearded Cuban with an over-

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46 Letter to the editor from Mary Meil, *Vancouver Sun*, 26 October 1962, p. 4.
excited look about him, which indicated that the Cubans in charge of the missiles were unpredictable, at the very least. This trope was also invoked by an editorial in the Montreal Gazette in the immediate post-crisis period that reminded people of the “forgotten man in the Soviet-American agreement to end the Cuban crisis – Premier Fidel Castro.” This editorial described Castro as an “unstable trouble-maker” who was resistant to Soviet control and unreasonable in his demands. The editorial reminded readers that “by and large the terms are completely unacceptable,” but then asked “what if, in an action of total lunacy, he were to seize control of the missile bases?” Post-crisis headlines shouted that Castro refused to comply with the UN and allow inspectors to verify that the missiles had been dismantled. This portrayal of Castro as an unpredictable and possibly insane rebel would perhaps have struck close to home for many Canadians.

So far this section has shown negative images of Castro in Canadian public discourse before and during the Cuban missile crisis. How did people interact with these images and common understanding to form an opinion about what was happening? One example of previously understood stereotypes of Castro being used in a political statement is the actions of the UBC engineers. As we have seen, on the Friday of the week of the crisis, a group of engineering students from UBC staged a protest. Approximately three or four hundred of them – the numbers vary from story to story – converged in front of the Vancouver city courthouse with their “prisoner” Fidel Castro. Castro was played by twenty-year-old Laurence Rooney from Chile, who was bilingual in English and Spanish. He looked similar to the Cuban leader, and wore combat fatigues

and carried a fat cigar in case there was any doubt about who he was supposed to represent. The students, many of them wearing red sweaters (an engineering identifier, not a political statement), pushed their Castro up against the wall and charged him with several serious offences. As each charge was read, the crowd shouted “guilty,” and as “Castro” attempted to defend himself in fluent Spanish, one member of the crowd apparently shouted “keep it clean” before he went down under a barrage from water pistols. The group was reported as carrying signs that read “Fidel, Si, Castro, No” and “Yankees, 3, Cubans, None.”

The press reaction to this youthful stunt showed a range of opinions about the appropriateness of the students’ reactions. Most of the stories covering the incident were published in prairie cities, and most just reported the facts. The consensus was that the students were merely venting their frustration and anxiety but overall, no harm was done. The Winnipeg Free Press however, ran a section called “Accent on Youth” in their Saturday, 3 November issue, discussing the actions of the engineers from several angles. John Montgomery, leader of the group, stressed in his piece that “the purpose of the stunt was not to protest the Cuban situation as it exists in Cuba, but rather to satirize the Cuban situation as it exists in Vancouver.” He noted how, since Kennedy’s Monday night address, there had been countless protests in the streets of Vancouver, usually instigated by pro-Cuban factions, most likely the protests led by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Every time the pro-Cuban groups staged a rally, he claimed, there was inevitably a


counter-protest staged by pro-Kennedy groups. He argued that “these groups soon lose sight of the situation they are protesting and the protest becomes just another means of placing the marcher’s political views before the public.”\textsuperscript{51} He stressed that he and his peers felt that the situation was ripe for satire, and that it was not the global crisis that they were criticizing, but rather the situation in Vancouver.

Support for Montgomery’s position came from a fellow UBC student. Donald Farish, president of the science undergraduates at the UBC and usually a rival of Montgomery’s (the two were always trying to “out stunt” each other), applauded the Castro execution as it made a point that sorely needed to be made in Vancouver. He stressed that these kinds of stunts were good because they showed the students to be politically interested and involved, rather than wasting away in their usual state of apathy. He also reminded readers of the massive rally staged on the UBC campus earlier that week by anti-American professors and the nuclear disarmament club. Farish explained the UBC engineering stunt was not protesting one side or the other, but rather protesting the belief that this was a time during which they could do nothing.\textsuperscript{52}

However, criticism of the engineers in Winnipeg was abundant. William Holburn, of United College, argued that their timing was unfortunate and it reflected badly on themselves and their university. He argued that “when considering what has been happening in the world it seems to me that these people have a lack of awareness, or a blatant disregard, for the seriousness of the situation.”\textsuperscript{53} Using their status as engineering students, known for pulling stunts of this sort, was not a good enough excuse

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Donald Farish, “I Regard the Stunt As A Good One,” \textit{Winnipeg Free Press}, 3 November 1962, p. 20.
for the bad taste they showed, and he concluded that these students were abusing the privilege of the post-secondary education they were receiving. Another columnist claimed that their signs were ridiculous and “show[ed] an almost childlike grasp of the situation.” He concluded that “as an effort at relieving tensions the protest probably worked admirably, but as satire, or even humour, failed so badly as to be the sort of thing one remembers when lying awake at night and then tries to exorcise by groans of anguished embarrassment.”

Yet another writer concurred, claiming that the stunt was simply not funny in a situation as grave as the current crisis. Shelley Tessler, a student at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, noted that

this was a crisis of such immense proportion that even students at the University of Manitoba – students primarily known for their lethargy and apathy – carried transistor radios with them throughout the school day in order to catch newscasts, packed an auditorium to hear a suddenly very timely speech on Cuba, and who, when laughing at jokes about radiation and annihilation, found themselves detecting just a hint of hysteria behind their slightly too loud laughter.

Some people found the engineers’ stunt amusing, well-timed and satirical; others did not. Was this incident something that we can simply dismiss as childish tension-relief, or was it something more than that?

There was more going on than these columnists in the Winnipeg Free Press allowed. The students were tapping into more issues than probably even they realized. They drew on images of Castro that were collectively understood. While Rooney did look like Castro, they added combat fatigues and a cigar, both of which were emblematic of the Cuban leader. The list of charges against Castro spoke to a real fear and political motive. It is arguable, to be sure, what was on the students’ minds as they shot their

water pistols at their fake Castro, but given the amount of media coverage, it cannot be dismissed out of hand. At the very least, it shows that these young individuals were actively engaged with certain portrayals of Castro that I have thus far discussed in this chapter.

Castro was portrayed in a number of negative ways before the crisis and that continued during the crisis as well. He was a pawn of the superpowers, and he and his country were depicted in gendered or infantilized language to stress their lack of power. He was also often marginalized as an unpredictable element. These portrayals of Castro, however, were certainly not the only way that Cuba – or Castro, for that matter – were understood. Such portrayals were often associated with a right-wing, anti-communist mindset. There were also more positive portrayals of Cuba, both before and during the crisis. We will return to the positive images, but before that I turn to two case studies which demonstrate the range of Canadian discussion regarding Cuba during the crisis. These issues had been debated in Canada long before the missile crisis erupted, but became central in public discourse during the crisis. The crisis was a catalyst for further debates about these issues: Canadian membership in the Organization of American States (OAS) and Canadian trade with Cuba.

**To Join or Not to Join: Canadian Membership in the Organization of American States (OAS)**

The possibility of Canadian membership in the OAS was debated throughout the twentieth century. Peter McKenna has written about Canada’s long history of what he calls “aloofness” from the OAS from its origins as the Pan-American Union in the early
twentieth century to the decision, under Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, to finally joining the organization in 1989.\textsuperscript{56} Since Prime Minister Diefenbaker came closest to joining the OAS in this period, it is worth discussing in some detail.

The origins of the OAS lie in the less organized Pan-American Union (PAU).\textsuperscript{57} Because of historical interest in the region compounded by Cold War strategic concerns, the United States sought to exert control and influence over the Latin American nations which comprised the PAU. As a result, the United States had a significant amount of influence within that organization. In 1947, the Rio Treaty formalized and codified that union. This treaty was, McKenna argues, an artifact of Cold War tensions, as it represented “in effect, a system of collective responsibility for the purposes of hemispheric solidarity.”\textsuperscript{58} The Charter of the OAS was signed in 1948, which solidified the principles of the Rio Treaty and created an inter-American alliance system. Canada was not a member of this system at the beginning, and interest in becoming a member waxed and waned over the years. Initially, the United States was not pleased by the thought of Canada, a nation which they believed was essentially a British stooge, being actively involved in inter-American affairs. But in the postwar period, there were a number of reasons for Canada’s continued “aloofness” from the organization. McKenna writes that “this conscious decision to remain outside these institutions was done for a number of reasons, including the lack of official government interest in the region, a concern about negative implication for the Canada-U.S. relationship, a preference for cultivating Canada’s European or North Atlantic connection, and a belief that the UN was

\textsuperscript{56} McKenna, \textit{Canada and the OAS}.
\textsuperscript{58} McKenna, \textit{Canada and the OAS}, p. 23.
more institutionally palatable to Canada.”

Overall, Canadian interests lay in fostering multilateral initiatives in which Canada, as a middle power, could have the most effective and efficient influence, and the OAS was not an organization which would help achieve this aim.

Cuba also became an issue which kept Canada out of the OAS. With Canada’s continued good relations with Cuba, and Cuba’s suspension from the OAS in the context of increased American hostility toward the island nation, some feared that Canadian membership would put the country in the precarious situation of having to choose between its allies. No matter how important trade or other relations were with Cuba, no sane Prime Minister would put Canadian-American relations into serious jeopardy.

Diefenbaker was the Prime Minister who came closest to joining the OAS. Although it seems surprising that this strident Cold Warrior and staunch British traditionalist would desire increased relations in the Latin American region, Peter McKenna argues that Diefenbaker was poised to do exactly that in April 1960 during his official trip to Mexico. Most likely, Diefenbaker believed that any diversification of trade away from the United States would be beneficial to Canada. However, between April 1960 and December 1961, a number of factors intervened to ensure that Diefenbaker and the Canadian government remained separate from the OAS. While Cuba was a concern, so too was opposition to the move from some Canadians, illustrated by various letters written to the PMO on the subject. There was also the May 1961 visit from Kennedy,

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59 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
60 Keating, Canada and World Order.
61 It is no wonder that Pierre Trudeau, despite official political opposition and fierce debates, respected Diefenbaker quite a bit. The two Prime Ministers, though extremely different in so many ways, actually shared a striking number of similar policy positions. See Robert Wright, Three Nights in Havana, pp. 58-59 for a discussion of Trudeau’s respect of Diefenbaker.
during which he publicly pressured Canada to join the OAS in a speech before the House of Commons. Diefenbaker, as a result, stepped back and remained aloof from the organization for the remainder of his term in office. As Jason Zorbas has pointed out, “the risks of membership ultimately outweighed the benefits.”

The issue of Canadian membership in the OAS never really went away. It emerged repeatedly in letters to the Prime Minister about Cuba both before and during the missile crisis. In general, the issue came up whenever specific events or issues focused national attention on Latin America. Following the Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961, a letter was sent to the PMO congratulating Diefenbaker on his position in the House of Commons following the “Cuban crisis of last week” and respectfully suggested that “you carry this policy to its inevitable end; that of leading Canada in membership in the Organization of American States and thereby closer ties with Latin America.”

During the missile crisis, interest in the OAS was rekindled. In order to show that he had multilateral support for his blockade, Kennedy sent a delegate to the OAS to outline the situation and ask for official approval of the blockade against Cuba. The result was, almost every Canadian newspaper told their readers, overwhelming support for the American action. Newspapers reported that a vote in favour of the American blockade was held and approved 19-0 with one abstention. That abstention, the stories were careful to note, was Uruguay, and not because of any moral qualms, but rather because communications difficulties made it impossible for their representative to vote.

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62 McKenna, chapter 3. See also chapter five for the reasons behind the final decision of Brian Mulroney to join the OAS in 1989 as well as the public reaction to that seemingly rash decision.

63 Zorbas, Diefenbaker, p. 7.

without direction from their government. Even Mexico and Brazil voted for the resolution supporting Kennedy, despite the American belief that these two countries would be difficult and vote against the blockade because of their traditionally strong ties with Cuba. Canadian interest in the OAS was also fuelled by suggestions made by Pearson that Canada at least send an observer to the organization to report back to the government what was going on. Social Credit leader Robert Thompson also supported the idea of joining the OAS.

What were the contours of the debate over membership in the OAS during the crisis? Robert Reford wrote a piece published in the *Halifax Chronicle Herald* immediately following the crisis, discussing the positions of the various Canadian leaders on membership in the OAS. Even though the Diefenbaker government was closer than any other Canadian government had been to joining the OAS, the manner in which the Cuban missile crisis played out made membership “seem even more remote as a practical proposition.” Reford claimed that the reason why Diefenbaker did not approve Pearson’s suggestion to send a Canadian observer to the OAS during the crisis was because of nuclear weapons. Though it seems rather roundabout, if Canada became embroiled in the organization, and if the organization decided to support Kennedy and raise their alert levels, this would force Diefenbaker to accept nuclear weapons for the

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65 The Uruguay representative was later able to verify that they were in favour of the blockade, cast his vote, and make it unanimous. See “American Move Wins Strong OAS Support,” *Montreal Gazette*, 24 October 1962, p. 1; “Majority from OAS back U.S.” *Regina Leader-Post*, 23 October 1962, p. 5; “Latin America backing naval blockade of Cuba,” *Regina Leader-Post* 23 October 1962, p. 33; “Offer Aid in Cuban Blockade,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* 26 October 1962, p. 21, for only a few examples of the coverage the blockade vote received in Canadian newspapers.

66 “Social Motion on OAS May Induce PC Action,” *Calgary Herald*, 31 October 1962, p. 2. This wire story also appeared in other newspapers at about the same time, at least in the *Ottawa Citizen* and the *Edmonton Journal*. This is not surprising given the popularity of Charles Lynch as a columnist.

Canadian Bomarc. This simply would not do, since accepting nuclear weapons on Canadian soil was exactly what Diefenbaker was trying to avoid. Membership in the OAS, then, had all sorts of potential dangers, and Reford concluded “one is forced to the ironic conclusion that the Progressive Conservative government, which has shown greater interest in Latin America than its predecessors, is now not likely to carry this interest to its logical conclusion of membership in OAS.”\(^{68}\) Though Reford thought OAS membership overall was desirable, he did not think it was likely any time in the near future, because of the manner in which the Cuban missile crisis played out.

Charles Lynch, another commentator who was never particularly fond of the Diefenbaker government, also wrote a piece on potential Canadian membership in the OAS. He was most concerned with the indecisiveness of the Canadian government during the Cuban missile crisis, and argued that the indecisiveness extended to the OAS as well. He noted that “the Cuban unpleasantness has brought to the fore again the question of Canadian membership in the Organization of American States. The government appears no nearer on a decision in this matter than it was in 1960.”\(^{69}\) Characterizing Canada’s response as a knee-jerk, nationalistic shift away from the OAS, he suggested that Social Credit Leader Thompson’s support for membership, in addition to Pearson’s request for a Canadian observer, might prompt some movement on the issue. Since OAS member countries “performed magnificently and played what may have been a decisive role in supporting the U.S. action and forcing the Russian back,” Lynch believed it was time to join. The Cuban missile crisis only strengthened his belief that

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
the OAS was a significant force in the region and helped successfully resolve the crisis in a peaceful manner.\(^7^0\)

Another columnist, Maurice Western, also wrote in favour of Canada’s joining the OAS in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis. Western argued that “there is now a distinct possibility that the question will be resolved at last in the shock of crisis and that we shall enter OAS [sic], not experimentally in this or that agency, but suddenly and through the front door in an effort to ward off a direct threat to our national security.”\(^7^1\) Later in the week, Western felt compelled to address the issue again, following the House of Commons debate in which Pearson also pressed Diefenbaker on the OAS issue. This second editorial accused Diefenbaker of evading the question, and congratulated Pearson for suggesting the OAS as a potential avenue for solving the crisis. The title of this latter piece summed up his overall message to the reader: “Reticence and Evasions at Ottawa: Canada and the Cuban Crisis.”\(^7^2\)

Not every commentator was in favour of Canada joining the OAS at this time however. The *Toronto Daily Star* reported on a talk given during the crisis by Ronald St. John MacDonald, professor of international law at the University of Toronto. He believed that Kennedy’s use of the OAS to help create legitimacy for the blockade against Cuba would be the organization’s downfall. Previously, the OAS was primarily a cultural and economic organization, and Kennedy’s attempt to make it function as a security agency along the lines of NATO could lead to its demise. Canadian membership

\(^7^0\) Ibid.
in such an organization would be pointless, at best.\textsuperscript{73} Another story written by Joseph Scanlon concurred with this negative assessment. He reminded readers that Kennedy had pushed Canada to join, and that “Canada has steered clear of the OAS, presumably because it did not want to get involved in Latin American politics and take a stand for or against Cuba.”\textsuperscript{74}

A letter sent to the PMO from Reverend and Mrs. H.N. Horricks of Calgary, Alberta was succinct. They wrote to Prime Minister Diefenbaker the following: “I wish to commend you for your refusal to discontinue our trade with Cuba, your refusal to join the O.A.S., and your refusal to allow nuclear arms in Canada.” Simple and to the point; they also wished to congratulate Diefenbaker on increasing the old age pension. While humorous in its brevity, it nevertheless hints at the link that existed between several issues such as the OAS, relations with Cuba, and nuclear weapons in Canada.

One final source of opposition to Canada joining the OAS came from the Canadian-Cuban Friendship Committee. I will discuss it here, but the general actions of the CCFC during the Cuban missile crisis will also be discussed below in more detail. In 1963, in the aftermath of the crisis, the CCFC distributed a detailed pamphlet on why Canada should stay out of the OAS. Entitled “Keep Canada Out: Why Canada Should Not Join the Organization of American States,” the pamphlet explores various reasons why the CCFC thought the OAS was merely a front for American interests. Noting that Cuba was suspended from the organization in the January 1962 Punta del Este conference by American strong-arming, the pamphlet claimed there were two different sets of goals

\textsuperscript{73} “Warn Cuba Crisis Can Hit All of Americas,” \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, 23 October 1962, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{74} Joseph Scanlon, “Cuba crisis again raises issue of Canada joining the OAS,” \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, 23 October 1962, p. 7.
of the OAS; those set out by its Charter, and those revealed by its actions. The former were noble and high-minded, such as peace and prosperity for all Americans,\textsuperscript{75} collective security in the face of aggression, internal or external, as well as a shared respect for international law and sovereignty and independence of member nations.\textsuperscript{76} But then the document asked, “do they truly reflect the aims of OAS or are they just propaganda?” The answer was a resounding no on both counts. The pamphlet argued that the OAS was controlled by rich corporations (such as the United Fruit Company) seeking to become richer. Furthermore, many of the OAS member states were military dictatorships, and the United States was only interested in the organization to expand its influence throughout Latin America. Cuba was feared, this pamphlet argues, because it attempted to chart a different course. For that, they were thrown out of the organization. The United States wanted Canada to join the OAS, to regain credibility for the organization due to Canada’s good name internationally, and to support American initiatives.\textsuperscript{77} This pamphlet appealed to issues that Canadians would have viewed favorably, such as the emphasis placed on Canada’s international reputation as a problem solver.

The effect that this public debate had on the Diefenbaker government’s decision to stay out of the OAS is difficult to measure. It may be that the issue was simply not important enough to foreign policy at the time, or that there was not enough public outcry to make it an issue. For the most part, in times of peace and stability, Canadians did not care all that much about the organization, and many probably did not even know what it

\textsuperscript{75} The phrase “American” in this sense does not mean what a North American would understand when they see the term. Rather, it is more like the use of the term that a Spanish-speaker would be familiar with. American, in this sense, means all of Latin America as well as the United States.


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
was. During the Cuban missile crisis it was discussed with greater frequency because Kennedy used it to create the impression that there was strong regional support for his blockade and a handful of Canadian politicians thought it might be a good idea to send an observer to the organization. The biggest concern regarding the OAS in this sense was that joining the organization might put Canada in an awkward position regarding its relationships with the United States and Cuba, and so the best position for the moment seemed to be to stay out of it.

**Trade with Cuba**

In a recent article discussing trilateral relations between Canada, Cuba and the United States, Cuban scholar Raul Rodriguez argues that trade has traditionally been a key issue in determining the nature of those relations. Canada and the United States have diverged in this issue because, while the United States trade relationship has been largely determined by politics, Canada’s trade relationship with Cuba has been determined primarily by economics. More specifically, he argues that the United States limits its trade with Cuba because of Cold War concerns, and Canada continues because, despite those concerns, trade is trade.\(^{78}\) However, Canadian policy towards Cuba has been determined by a number of factors, including the personalities of various Prime Ministers and their views of the United States (and its President). Cold War considerations, economic issues, the international climate, Cuban politics and Canadian public opinion are also factors.

This section will examine Canadian views of trade with Cuba, beginning with a brief history of trade relations, and a survey of public opinion before the missile crisis. During the missile crisis, continued trade with Cuba was again up for debate as those in favor of Kennedy’s actions towards Cuba called for the end of Canadian trade relations. But, as we will see, in the aftermath of the crisis, the status quo was maintained. Why was this possible? Why did such a fervently anticommunist Prime Minister as Diefenbaker choose to maintain this relationship? What can this relationship tell us about the range of perceptions about Cuba in Canada during and after the missile crisis?

Unlike the Varadero-based tourist industry which forms the basis of the image of Cuba that most Canadians have at present, trade was the foundation upon which the early relationship between the two countries was built. As John Kirk and Peter McKenna have written, that trade relationship began with the founding of Halifax in the late eighteenth century. Early trade goods between Canada and Cuba consisted of salt fish (especially cod), lumber and potatoes going south in exchange for sugar, rum and exotic fruits. Since then, trade between Canada and Cuba has fluctuated according to a number of factors. The 1947 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) led to increased trade between Canada and Cuba, but increased competition from American firms in the 1950s led to a decline in trade with Canada. After the revolution, Canada continued trade relations with Cuba, but those relations were never vitally important to foreign policy formation, nor were trade relations with Cuba as important for Canada’s economy as were those with the United States.

79 Kirk and McKenna, *Canada-Cuba Relations*, p. 10.
After Castro nationalized American companies in 1960, the United States enacted a trade embargo against Cuba, hoping to put economic pressure on the regime. Why did Canada continue trade with Cuba? Despite early claims that Diefenbaker did so for nationalistic reasons, buttressed by his personal dislike of Kennedy, it has been shown that American officials actually had a significant role in making sure that Canada remained friendly to Cuba so as not to completely alienate the latter and send Castro straight into the Soviet camp.\textsuperscript{80} In addition, recent scholarship on Diefenbaker’s larger policy regarding Latin America has shown that Diefenbaker believed that in continuing trade ties with Cuba, he was doing what was best for Canada. As discussed above, he was concerned with the pragmatic realization that any diversification of trade away from Cuba would help lessen the importance of trade with the United States, as Jason Zorbas has shown.\textsuperscript{81}

In December 1960, then, Diefenbaker clarified Canadian policy on trade with Cuba. No strategic goods could be traded with Cuba (or had been for more than a year), which included “arms, ammunition, military and related equipment, or materials of a clearly strategic nature.” Certain goods which were not specifically military in nature but could be used by a military, such as aircraft engines, were subject to case-by-case review for export permits. All non-military goods could be traded without limitation. This policy statement also stressed that “for Canada to restrict exports of non-strategic Canadian goods to Cuba in conformity with the United States embargo would be to impose a stricter control on trade with Cuba than we have with the countries of the Sino-Soviet bloc” and that goods of United States origin would not be bootlegged to Cuba.

\textsuperscript{80} Molinaro, “Calculated Diplomacy.”
\textsuperscript{81} Zorbas, \textit{Diefenbaker}, pp. 117-131.
through Canada as a back-door route. Diefenbaker stated “we do not minimize American concern, but it is the Government’s view that to maintain mutually beneficial economic relations with Cuba may help and contribute to the restoration of traditional relationships between Cuba and the Western world.” Diefenbaker was aware that this policy was controversial within Canada. But the overall stakes were simply too high to completely cut Cuba out of hemispheric trade.

How did Canadians feel about trade with Cuba? Did many people agree with Diefenbaker’s assessment of the situation? The answer is complicated, since there was, on one hand, backlash from some Canadians about continued trade with Castro’s Cuba. On the other hand, some Canadians commended Diefenbaker for taking a strong position. In the former group, a few key themes emerged. First and most important for many was that Castro’s Cuba was, they believed, Communist, and therefore should not be a trade partner. They objected to the idea that Canada would sell out its ally, the United States, solely to make a quick buck. J.S. Davis wrote to the PMO to express his disgust and disappointment at the Diefenbaker government’s trade policy “in light of present circumstances,” since “Communism continues to make major world wide gains and shall continue to progress so long as there is such disunity among western powers.” He concluded by rebuking Diefenbaker “Shame…Where are your principals [sic] and your honor?”

Another letter invoked similar sentiments:

When the free world led by the United States is engaged in all-out “cold” war against the spread of Communism, I deeply resent the fact that Canada is still engaged in trade with Cuba…Perhaps I should remind you that Communism as

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such is bent on ruling the world! … I know that the goods we ship to them are non-strategic but that’s not the point. It’s the principle of the thing.  

The United States was engaged in a war against communism, and thus Canada, as an ally of the United States, should stop trading with Communist governments.

Others who reprimanded Diefenbaker did so after Minister of Trade George Hees met with a Cuban delegation in late 1960. As Kirk and McKenna have pointed out, the Cuban trade delegation came to Canada to secure relations and discuss trade policy. After the meeting, Hees said that one could not find better businessmen anywhere. For this comment, he was treated to such a backlash that he was forced to go on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s television program “Front Page Challenge” and apologize for “the insensitivity of his remarks and noting his personal lack of sympathy for the Castro regime and its treatment of religious groups in Cuba.”

The reaction against him and his apparent eagerness to deal with Communist Cuba was especially vitriolic. One citizen wrote to Hees a “word of warning, sir!” and reminded him that one must watch one’s step with the Cubans since, apparently, “once politics enters the picture in Cuba, no one connected therewith can be trusted to fulfill a contract unless massive ‘chivo’ (graft, that is) is involved.” This writer assured Hees that he knew what he was talking about, having spent twenty-five years there.

Another individual called Hees’ actions “stupid visionless adventuresomeness” and reminded the Prime Minister that “Canada does need trade, no doubt, but not with Cuba and Communist China, particularly when it is to our

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85 Kirk and McKenna, Canada-Cuba Relations, p. 43-44.
own detriment and to that of the Western World.”

The backlash against Hees invoked many anti-communist fundamentals. Some Canadians believed that it was simply wrong and dangerous to try and continue trade with Cuba given its communist leanings.

However, not everyone subscribed to this image of Cuba. There was some support for the idea of trade with Cuba before the missile crisis. Supporters of trade with Cuba did not necessarily defend Cuba’s image or believe that Castro was not a communist. Rather, support for continued trade with Cuba before the crisis was often configured in terms of Canada’s need to do what best suited its interests and keep the United States out of domestic issues. For instance, one letter to the Prime Minister said that “I feel that the course you have chosen is not only admirable because it displays independent action on the part of our country but will rather promote the cause of freedom in a most effective manner, since unfortunately I feel that our neighbors to the south have at times, perhaps inadvertently, alienated any possibility of maintaining friendly relations with the nations of the world that are struggling for a better standard of living.”

Cuba and China were merely trying to raise their standard of living, and the United States had alienated them and attempted to stop Canada from trying to help. This could not be allowed to happen. Others agreed with this assessment of the situation as well, some more succinctly than others. H. L. Rutley, for example, wrote to Diefenbaker “I take my hat off to you when you told the yanks we trade with everybody, who are the

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yanks to tell us who we can trade with.” The United States simply must not be allowed to prevent Canada from trading with whom it pleased.

Diefenbaker continued trading with Cuba after the American embargo took effect, since there was no reason not to, and plenty of reason for the policy to continue. Aside from the occasional controversy, such as Hees’ comments about the Cuban trade delegation, there was no indication that the policy would change. However, once the missile crisis broke out, and Kennedy implemented the American quarantine around the island, Canada’s trade policy with Cuba again became a matter of public discussion. On Tuesday morning of the crisis, 23 October, newspapers reported that while some government representatives were considering toughening Canada’s position towards Cuba, the general consensus was that those ties would not be completely severed. The Ottawa Citizen reported that “official Ottawa had been shocked by the Kennedy report” and that Canada’s relationship with Cuba was up for review and discussion within Cabinet that day. However, this story also reported that “they considered it unlikely that Ottawa would slice its diplomatic and commercial ties with the island but there might be a diplomatic move to express Canada’s displeasure with the arming developments and a tightening of the export control list restricting shipments from Canada to Cuba.”

Another news item depicted levels of trade with Cuba in recent years (see figure 3.8). This graph showed Canadian trade with Cuba for 1959 and 1960 hovering around the $15 million mark, then doubling in 1961 to about $30 million. Then, in the first few months of 1962, trade dropped to approximately $6 million. It had dropped so significantly that

formally severing relations with Cuba was pointless. A story in the *Globe and Mail* reported that Trade Minister George Hees said that since trade was already so low, and since all goods traded with Cuba were already tightly controlled thanks to the trade policy outlined in December 1960, there was no need for any significant change in that policy in light of the blockade.

What was the response to this situation? Columnist Bruce West argued that Canada’s trade with Cuba was not the problem. Rather, he objected to the “almost malicious satisfaction in flaunting our great independence by doing so.” He explained his opinion further:

> It seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that we were not proving our national maturity by virtually courting an avowed enemy of the United States to show the world what a sturdily independent nation we were. On the contrary, we were displaying a kind of adolescence in which certain extremely important moral principles were being sacrificed in the interests of what seemed to me to be a narrow kind of Canadian pride.

Contrary to many others who objected to trade with Cuba, his position was not based on the fact that Cuba and Castro were communist. Rather, his objections were based on the fact that Canada was exerting an independent trade policy and was proud of it. Bruce West objected to the policy of maintaining trade relations with a country solely to assert independence from another. However, for some Canadians, this sentiment was the whole purpose behind continued trade with Cuba. For these Canadians, as historian Karen Dubinsky has observed, “if Cuba is America's wayward child, perhaps for ever-obedient

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92 “No Change in Trade With Cuba, Canadian Minister Says,” *Globe and Mail*, 24 October 1962, p. 11.
Canadians Cuba is that one bad friend you had in high school, the one you kept company with just to annoy your parents."  

One specific incident in the immediate aftermath of the crisis demonstrates why trade with Cuba was an important facet of Canadian foreign policy. Speaking to a closed meeting of the Rosseau group (“a study and research group of conservative minded young men”) on 8 November, George Hogan, National Vice-President of the Progressive Conservative Association, suggested that Canada should break off all diplomatic and trade ties with Cuba in light of the recent crisis. He also suggested, according to several wire stories that appeared in newspapers across the country, that Canada should stop dithering on the nuclear weapons issue, and should give increased authority to the senior Canadian military officer at the North American Air Defence Command to raise the alert level of Canadian air defence forces. This would repair the rift between Canada and the United States caused by the recent Cuban crisis, and put things back to normal. What is unusual about this otherwise unremarkable news story – it was, after all, a closed meeting – is that it received national media attention. Later in the week, newspapers reported that the President of the association refuted the statements of Vice-President Hogan, and stressed that Hogan’s comments reflected only his personal views. Diefenbaker was

95 “Cuba Break Urged by Leading Tory,” Vancouver Sun, 9 November 1962, p. 3.
96 See, for example of the various stories that covered Hogan’s speech, “Cuba Break Urged By Leading Tory: Time to Stand Solid With U.S., Says National Vice-President,” Vancouver Sun, 9 November 1962, p. 3; “Cut Cuba Ties, PC Urges,” Montreal Gazette, 9 November 1962, p. 1; “Tory Officer Suggests Severing of Relations With Cuba,” Calgary Herald, 9 November 1962, p. 29; and “Hogan Would Break Relations With Cuba,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 9 November 1962, p. 6.
97 “Cuba Stand Shunned,” Edmonton Journal, 10 November 1962, p. 31.
also asked whether he shared Hogan’s views, and responded that Hogan’s views were his own, and not those of the party. 98

Hogan’s comments became a lightning rod for the debate, galvanizing editorial commentary immediately following the missile crisis. An editorial in the Ottawa Citizen criticized Hogan’s statements. While his comments may only have been a reflection of his personal opinion, if they were implemented, Canada would become an American lackey. To this commentator,

Washington is as capable of stupidity as any other capital. In the case of Cuba, the policies pursued by the American government may have led only to a tightening of Communist control in Cuba. That is the record. It may be too late to repair the damage. But if it is not, then Canada, which has maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba, can perhaps play a constructive role which in the long run might make Canada neutral, if nothing else. 99

This individual believed that cutting Canada’s ties with Cuba, as suggested by Hogan, would be disastrous, and that Canada could play a role in bringing Cuba back into the western camp. Another editorial in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix concurred with this assessment. Hogan’s comment, this piece argued, “suggests that Canada’s foreign and defence policies should be geared without restraint to coincide with those of the United States…the proposal to immediately sever diplomatic relations with Cuba will serve no useful purpose at this stage.” It went on to note that Canada has no problem with Cuba, and if Hogan’s statements became official policy, any future use that Canada could serve as “a reconciling influence in the Cuba situation” would be over. 100 If Canada severed trade ties with Cuba, it would only demonstrate that Canada was a stooge

98 “Canada’s Policy Toward Cuba,” Ottawa Citizen, 10 November 1962, p. 6.
99 Ibid.
100 “Canada’s Policy Decisions,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 20 November 1962, p. 11.
of the United States and would be abandoning the possibility of acting as a mediator between Cuba and the western bloc.

One final editorial, appearing in the *Montreal Gazette*, also disagreed with Hogan’s comments, but suggested an explanation for why he made them in the first place. In his regular column “Day by Bay,” Arthur Blakely suggested that Hogan’s comments were the equivalent of floating a trial balloon. Blakely claimed that Hogan was acquainted with the Prime Minister and that he had been in Ottawa the day before he gave the speech. He also implied that although the meeting was supposedly closed, it was barely over before copies of the speech were handed to the press, which was unusual. Blakely thus suggested that Hogan was acting on behalf of the party to test the national mood regarding Canadian policy toward Cuba. His evidence was circumstantial, but given the negative media coverage Hogan’s comments received, and the fact that in the end, Canada’s Cuba policy did not change, he may have been on to something. In any case, Hogan’s comments and the resulting reaction showed that Canada’s trade with Cuba was a pressing issue for Canadians during and in the post-missile crisis period.

**Pro-Cuban Sentiment from the Left and Cuban Solidarity Groups**

Thus far this chapter has discussed anti-communist portrayals of Castro and Cuba, as well as how two specific issues – Canadian membership in the OAS and Canadian trade with Cuba – were debated during the missile crisis. I will now turn to the other end of the spectrum and examine how positive portrayals of Cuba worked in the popular imagination. Beginning with a discussion of general support for Cuba, I will then look at how leftist elements of Canadian society during the missile crisis understood Cuba’s
position. The remainder of the section examines the actions of the two main solidarity groups in Canada, the Fair Play For Cuba Committee (FPCC) and the Canadian-Cuban Friendship Committee (CCFC) to show how they tried to bring a different version of Cuba to the Canadian public.

Support for Cuba during the crisis came in a form not unfamiliar to Canadians at the time. Whether for or against Cuba’s actions in accepting Soviet missiles on the island, many Canadians used similar imagery and metaphors in describing and either condemning or defending their actions. We have already seen how Cuba and Castro were often portrayed as pawns, infantilized and gendered, or depicted as an unknowable and unpredictable entity. Those who supported Cuba’s actions used much of the same imagery to do so, only they spun it in a positive light. For example, Castro was depicted as a romantic freedom-fighter who only wanted to free his country of dictators and greedy American business interests. In this sense, Cubans were courageous, and American fears were ludicrous. A letter to the editor of the Toronto Daily Star illustrated this: “now that the Cubans had the courage to throw out a dictator, the Americans are scared of Cuban aggression? What utter rot; they have a huge naval base right in Cuba. What right have the Americans to plant all kinds of bases in nearly every country?”\textsuperscript{101}

Cuba, the smaller power, posed no real threat to the United States, and it was only American paranoia and desire to expand their empire which caused the missile crisis.

Cuba was also sometimes depicted as a bullied child merely trying to defend itself. This image was previously invoked to show Cuba’s immaturity and need for assistance from parent-nations like the United States lest it fall into the hands of the

\textsuperscript{101} Letter to the editor, signed Charles White, \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, 26 October 1962, p. 6.
Soviet Union. But for those sympathetic to Cuba, this child metaphor was used to show that accepting the missiles was a defensive act and not dangerous. A letter to the editor of the *Toronto Daily Star* conveyed this sense succinctly. “Cuba, which has invaded no one, committed no acts of aggression against any other country, apparently means to protect herself against American domination. Good luck to her.”

102 Another letter in a different newspaper used the same rhetorical device: “Cuba’s plight is like that of the weak boy attacked by the neighborhood boy (Bay of Pigs).” This letter read:

> Once assaulted, a weakling seeks help to prevent further hurt to himself. And we need to remember that it was the U.S. which forced Cuba to look for assistance elsewhere, by cutting off trade after the Cuban people ousted Batista…It is imperative that Canada not align herself with the U.S., but maintain friendly and independent relations with Cuba, which, like the victim of any bully, needs friends.

This letter depicts Cuba as the helpless child being bullied by a bigger neighbor, but also paints Canada as a kid on the block big enough to stop the U.S. from bullying.

Support for Cuba in Canada also came from the political left. In the years leading up to the crisis, the Communist Party was active in letter-writing campaigns to the government, asking for support for Cuba against American aggression. This was especially true in the initial stages of American-Cuban conflict and in the immediate aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Victoria Labour Council, for example, heartily endorsed Canadian trade with Cuba because they believed it would help mitigate Canada’s unemployment crisis.

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104 Various regional offices of the Communist Party of


103 Letter to the editor, signed June Black, *Vancouver Sun*, 26 October 1962, p. 4.

Canada also sent in letters to the Prime Minister’s Office voicing their approval of continued trade with Cuba. These included the Northwestern Ontario Regional Committee, the Sudbury Committee, as well as two separate letters from the National Committee and from another meeting in Toronto. They believed that if Canada remained an unquestioning ally of the United States, the country would be dragged into a third world war, and Canadians expected Diefenbaker to step up and make decisions that were best for Canada, not for the Cold War alliance system. Trade with Cuba must continue in order to achieve all these things.105 Local 480 of the International Union of Mine, Mill & Smelterworkers sent a letter along the same lines.106

It is not surprising that during the crisis, various leftist factions supported Cuba and condemned Kennedy for bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war. The Saskatchewan branch of the Communist Party of Canada, for example, placed an advertisement in the Regina Leader-Post on 27 October at the height of the crisis (see figure 3.9). This advertisement reminded people that war over Cuba would mean nuclear war, and begged the United Nations to get involved. It read:

The authority of the United Nations must be restored! President Kennedy has brought the whole world to the brink of war and threatened the sovereign rights of all nations to freedom of the seas…We are on the brink of nuclear war / We cannot leave the fate of our children and our country to politicians. We must speak out now! Raise our voices before it is too late! Labor and farm organizations, churches and all people’s groups should speak and act in this moment of peril.107

105 These letters were mostly sent in late 1960, as Canada’s policy towards Cuba was taking shape in the wake of the implementation of the American embargo. There are also a few from April 1961, immediately after the American sponsored Bay of Pigs fiasco. See DCC, Series VI, Vol. 476, File 722/C962 Foreign Trade – Trade by Countries – Cuba June 1961, various letters from regional committees of the Communist Party of Canada to PMO.
107 Advertisement, Regina Leader-Post, 27 October 1962, p. 18.
More support from the left during the crisis came from Tommy Douglas. Douglas had just been re-elected in the British Columbia Burnaby-Coquitlam riding as the missile crisis broke out, and wasted no time in condemning Kennedy’s actions. Though heavily criticized by the press for his statement (he was called foolish, a communist, and “profoundly misleading”) he nevertheless stood by his comments.\textsuperscript{108} The Saskatchewan New Democratic Party (NDP) agreed with him, however, and also voiced support for Cuba and condemnation of Kennedy’s actions in a public meeting after the crisis. The \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix} reported on the meeting: “a resolution rapping the United States action in Cuba, calling for disarmament, and urging the government to say definitely nuclear weapons would not be allowed in Canada was passed at a public meeting here Wednesday night.” The meeting, sponsored by the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and NDP, gave unanimous support to the resolution, which called the U.S. blockade “an irresponsible and unjustified maneuver which brought mankind to the brink of extermination…freedom of the seas and of international trade must be maintained.”\textsuperscript{109} Thus various different representatives of the left supported Cuba, and condemned the aggressive and unprovoked American action.

Support for Cuba during the crisis also came from Cuban solidarity groups. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC) was active in protests throughout the nation during the crisis. The FPCC, in particular, had ties to the American organization.\textsuperscript{110} As Cynthia Wright has shown, the Canadian FPCC managed to stay intact despite considerable RCMP pressure, even after the American branch succumbed to the weight

\textsuperscript{109} “Cuban Action Rapped,” \textit{Saskatoon Star-Phoenix}, 15 November 1962, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{110} For an excellent discussion of the American FPCC, see Gosse, \textit{Where the Boys Are}, pp. 137-173.
of state surveillance.\textsuperscript{111} The FPCC’s primary aim was to educate Canadians about the “real” Cuba. In so doing, they “were part of the difficult process of opening up political dissent within the stifling context of McCarthyism and the Cold War consensus.”\textsuperscript{112} The Canadian branch was formed by Vernel and Anne Olsen in 1961, who, for the first few years of the FPCC’s existence, travelled to Cuba, helped Cubans who wanted to travel to Canada, arranged student exchanges and trips, and produced pamphlets for publication to educate Canadians about what the Cuban revolution really meant.\textsuperscript{113} The FPCC supported Canada’s continued trade with Cuba after the American embargo was put in place in late 1960. They asked that large-scale, long-term loans and credits be granted to the Cuban government, which would allow increased trade between Canada and Cuba and “would provide much needed assistance to the hard pressed Cuban people and would also provide work for the underemployed here in Canada.”\textsuperscript{114}

The FPCC swung into action immediately following Kennedy’s speech. As we have seen, that very night they had protesters in front of the American consulate in Vancouver.\textsuperscript{115} Another FPCC-organized protest in Winnipeg received press attention as well, and although there was no accompanying story, the picture in the \textit{Winnipeg Free Press} showed well-dressed men and women, some holding the hands of small children. Their signs said “Hands Off Cuba” and “Must Children Die?” They garnered little

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] Ibid., p. 98.
\item[113] These pamphlets were on a variety of subjects. Some were English translations of Castro’s speeches, others were the reports from various Canadians, students and otherwise, who had been to Cuba and described their experiences there. See, for example, the pamphlets entitled, “Canadian Students in Cuba” (1965), “The Real Cuba, as Three Canadians Saw It” (1964), and “Four Canadians Who Saw Cuba” (1963).
\item[115] \textit{Calgary Herald}, 23 October 1962, p. 11.
\end{footnotes}
negative attention in the Winnipeg press.\textsuperscript{116} Another protest was organized by the FPCC in Toronto in front of the American consulate on Tuesday, 23 October at noon. This protest, called a “peace rally,” was sponsored by students of the University of Toronto, but the leaflet that was distributed to tell people where and when the protest was occurring was printed by the Toronto FPCC.\textsuperscript{117} The leaflet was accompanied by a press release which told Canadians that they must pay attention. The release, which is worth quoting at length, read as follows:

\begin{quote}
No fair-minded person will deny Cuba the right of self-defence against forces being unleashed by the powerful United States.

The ordinary people of Canada and the United States have nothing in common with the U.S. rulers in Washington who, without their consent, are taking the peoples of the entire world to the very brink of nuclear destruction. We have no interest in defending the profits of Yankee and Canadian capital invested in Latin America. Above all, we are not prepared to go to war against the people of Revolutionary Cuba.

…We call upon the oppressed peoples of Latin America to rise up in thunderous condemnation of the crime about to be committed by the profit-hungry rulers of North America.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

Signed by national chairman Vernel Olsen, it was a call to arms for Canadians and Latin Americans to stop the imperialists – not necessarily only American – from causing nuclear war. The FPCC argued that the Cuban situation was not of Castro’s making, and that there was another way to understand what was happening.

The Canadian-Cuba Friendship Committee was another Cuban solidarity group similar to the FPCC. The CCFC also staged a protest, though smaller than those of the FPCC, in Toronto. The \textit{Halifax Chronicle-Herald} carried the CP wire photo of the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Winnipeg Free Press}, 26 October 1962, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{117} LAC, Fair Play for Cuba Committee Records, Volume 70, File 3, Poster for Peace Rally, 22 October 1962.
\textsuperscript{118} LAC, Fair Play for Cuba Committee Records, Volume 70, File 3, Press Release by FPCC, 22 October 1962.
\end{footnotes}
protesters, carrying signs that said “Hands off Cuba” and “Halt Spy Flights over Cuba.”

Another news item in the Regina Leader-Post announced that although there were only about thirty protesters the first day, President Roland Nunex of the CCFC would be joined by another 300 or so by Wednesday. The CCFC was also active during the missile crisis in organizing protests, though it was less well-known than the FPCC.

Although there was a certain amount of backlash against these solidarity groups and those who supported Cuba in general, they nevertheless made their opinions and views of Cuba known, and used the national media coverage they received to get their message out to Canadians. Their message was simple: Cuba was merely defending itself. The United States forced Castro to seek help and defensive measures against potential invasion. The missile crisis was unnecessary war-mongering on the part of John F. Kennedy. They told Canadians their version of the truth about Cuba, and in so doing, as Cynthia Wright has suggested, widened the scope of public debate about Cuba in Canada.

Whether or not they, along with leftist political groups and those who supported Cuba in general, succeeded in publicizing what they believed was the truth about Cuba is difficult to say. However, their actions during the missile crisis showed that there was some positive discussion of Cuba in Canada.

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120 Regina Leader-Post, 24 October 1962, p. 13.
121 Wright, “Between Nation and Empire,” p. 98.
Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which Canadians understood Cuba and Castro around the time of the missile crisis. There was anti-communism and prejudice about Castro’s alleged links to both Communism and the Soviet Union. In a Cold War climate, this influenced the manner in which some Canadians viewed the island. Two specific issues – Canadian membership in the OAS and continued Canadian trade with Cuba – were also discussed. While the crisis brought both these issues back to the center stage of public discussion, neither policy changed as a result of the crisis. Perhaps this is because those who sympathized with Cuba were persuasive, or perhaps the issues were not sufficiently inflammatory for the government to change them. In any event, after the crisis, Canada remained outside the OAS, and continued to trade with Cuba despite the American embargo. This chapter then concluded with a brief survey of positive understandings of Cuba and Castro and the work of solidarity groups during the crisis.

One cannot say that all Canadians believed one thing or another about Cuba. In fact, this chapter has shown that there was a range of opinion on the subject. This idea was malleable and changed over time and from individual to individual. Political affiliation was an influencing aspect, but it was by no means the determining factor in what an individual believed about Cuba. This, however, is only one facet of the Canadian experience of the Cuban missile crisis. Cuba was a player in the crisis, but so too, of course, was the United States. Canadian proximity, both geographical and cultural, to that behemoth was something with which many Canadians were concerned during the crisis.
Chapter Four – “The Tail of Every Kite?” Canada and the United States

Shortly after the Cuban missile crisis ended, the Montreal Gazette ran a story by Drummond Burgess called “Canada and The Cuban Crisis.” In this story, Burgess asked: “what was the foreign policy of Canada during the Cuban crisis?” Burgess said it was not an easy question to answer, since the government seemed motivated by two conflicting desires. The first was “the desire (or the duty?) to support Canada’s ally, the United States Government” and the second, “the desire, which in the past has proved irresistible to Mr. Howard Green, to ensure that Canada followed an independent policy, which to Mr. Green seems to mean a policy different from that of the United States.”

Despite his summary of what happened in political circles in Ottawa during the Cuban missile crisis, Burgess could not answer his own question. Burgess argued that Diefenbaker’s lack of decisive leadership showed him and his government to be “evasive and inconsistent.” Most demoralizing, he claimed that Canada made a poor showing amongst its allies, and that “what happened in Canada’s policy during the Cuban crisis was weaker than that of the United States, Britain, France and West Germany. It was weaker than that of all the Latin American States.”

This analysis of the post-Cuban missile crisis situation was, for Canadian commentators, pretty average. Many newspapers and citizens noted Diefenbaker’s attempt to negotiate between whole-hearted support for a dangerous American Cold War confrontation and a misplaced nationalistic reaction to the situation. Diefenbaker’s initial

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1 Drummond Burgess, “Canada and the Cuban Crisis,” Montreal Gazette, 8 November 1962, p. 6.
2 Ibid.
lack of support for the United States, as well as his suggestion to send in a United Nations inspection team were at first considered potentially useful, but curious. As the crisis wore on, and in the days and months following the Cuban missile crisis, Diefenbaker was depicted as “dithering” and indecisive. During the crisis he refused to allow nuclear weapons into Canada, but debate over these weapons did not end with the crisis. His Cabinet was split over the issue, but Diefenbaker believed Canadians wanted him to stand up to American pressure to accept their warheads for Canada’s Bomarcs. Eventually the splits in his Cabinet became too deep to be reconciled and his government was defeated in a non-confidence vote.

However, it is not enough to simply state that Diefenbaker lacked the will or political ability to make a decisive stand. My goal is to widen the scope beyond the politics and understand how some Canadians ascribed meaning to their relationship with the United States. Public reaction thus centered around three key themes: Canadian reaction to American pressure on the Canadian-Cuban trade relationship; Canadian acquisition of American nuclear warheads; and finally, the lack of consultation before Kennedy went public. These issues are central to understanding the nuances of Canadian perceptions of the Canadian-American relationship. Diefenbaker, proud of his reputation as a populist politician, relied on public opinion as well as the differing opinions of his Cabinet, both of which were divided. Thus he appeared indecisive. While some did not want their government to simply toe the American line, neither did they want to seriously damage the Canadian-American relationship. During the Cuban missile crisis, a number of Canadians wanted their government to chart an independent path. But it was vital to do so without destroying the overall political, diplomatic, and social relationship between
the two countries. This chapter will therefore examine the issues which became subjects of public discourse during the Cuban missile crisis and in the immediate aftermath which focused on the Canadian-American relationship. This chapter thus examines the range of and complexity in that relationship.

**Canadian Trade with Cuba…Despite American Pressure?**

In chapter three I discussed shades of Canadian opinion regarding continued trade with Cuba after the American embargo took effect. However, to completely understand the complexity of this trade relationship, it is necessary to examine how many Canadians responded to perceived American pressure regarding trade with Cuba. During the crisis some Canadians assumed that the United States would finally persuade Canada to join the embargo against Cuba. However, Diefenbaker maintained the trade relationship and since then, the Canadian trade and diplomatic relationship with Cuba has been steady. The reaction to America’s perceived ability to dictate with whom Canada could trade was strong, but there was a spectrum of reactions. Some voiced fierce displeasure that the United States thought they could boss Canada around, and thus warmly congratulated the Prime Minister for standing up to the continental bully. Others chastised Diefenbaker for not more fully supporting a vital ally.

In *Perceptions of Cuba*, Lana Wylie illustrates how perception can have an enormous impact on foreign policy.³ Her book explores how the United States and Canada perceive their relations with Cuba, countering traditional explanations for why

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³ Wylie, *Perceptions of Cuba*.
Canada and the United States treat Cuba so differently. Traditionally, good relations between Canada and Cuba have been explained as the result of a Canadian desire for a market free of American competition. Relations between Cuba and the United States were made difficult by security considerations that went along with the presence of a communist country so close to its borders. As the nature of the Cold War shifted, relations were increasingly determined by the powerful voice of Cuban exiles in Miami.\(^4\) Wylie argues that these traditional explanations for relations between Cuba, Canada and the United States are not sufficient. The determining factor in the formation of Cuban policy was actually identity and self-perceptions held by the United States and Canada. Canadian policy, she argues, was determined by the need to assert both “good international citizenship” and a course independent from the United States.\(^5\) *Perceptions of Cuba* provides an important framework for understanding not only the Canadian reaction to the United States and Cuba, but also to understanding the range of reaction to the Cuban missile crisis.

Letters sent to the Prime Minister discussing alleged American pressure on Canadian trade policy validates Wylie’s argument. Perceived American interference in Canada’s trade with Cuba garnered a range of responses. Some agreed with the American desire that Canada join the embargo against Cuba. Others applauded Prime Minister Diefenbaker for showing gumption and defying American pressure.\(^6\) There was certainly condemnation directed at Diefenbaker for letting down an ally and trading with

\(^4\) Ibid., pp. 4-5.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 5.
\(^6\) See Dennis Molinaro, “‘Calculated Diplomacy’: John Diefenbaker and the Origins of Canada’s Cuba Policy,” in *Our Place in the Sun: Canada and Cuba in the Castro Era*, eds. Robert Wright and Lana Wylie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 75-95 for an interesting discussion of the extent to which Kennedy actually shaped Canada’s Cuba policy through giving Diefenbaker little choice but to take a nationalist stance.
a communist country before it was clear what the official trade policy actually was. One citizen wrote to Diefenbaker criticising him for selling out friends. “Sir” this letter reads, “This letter is to state I take the sharpest possible exception to our trade with Cuba and definitely won’t vote for you again. Judas sold Christ out for 30 pieces of silver, considering Canada’s wealth you sold out our American friends for 30 pieces of copper.” In no uncertain terms, the author of this letter went on to tell Diefenbaker what he thought:

May I remind you…cheap politician we are supposedly anti-communist and if you can’t see beyond your nose, a communist government in the hemisphere could damage weaker democracies in the south. We should hinder not help it. Castro is nothing but a cheap lying communist thief and we are acting as fences and dealers in stolen funds (he has no other type of funds). 7

Another letter stressed the great friendship between Canada and the United States and the immorality of trading with Cuba. L. Henry Timmins from Woodbridge, Ontario, thought that “the blatant overtures that we offered to that sinister government are offensive and out of order. The friendship of the American people has a far more enduring quality than Cuban trade, and while it has been traditional, let us not take it for granted.” He also commented on the now infamous words of praise by Trade Minister George Hees for the Cuban trade delegation from 1960: “you can’t do business with finer businessmen.” Timmins’ “feeling of embarrassment and disgust for his statement [were] acute.” 8 Eric E. Gould shared the same sentiments. He wrote that “surely it is not in the interest of this great country to put our financial interests before our convictions of ‘right and wrong’. We are a part of the west, as opposed to the communist conspiracy, and it

would be traitorous of us to advance the cause of communism one whit...We owe the United States full support.”

Both of these letters express support for the United States as an ally and neighbor, but the most expressive language is used to create a picture of Cuba as morally corrupt.

Canadians took Diefenbaker to task for bowing to a “Communist conspiracy” and trading with Castro. Even some Americans and Canadians living abroad wrote to Diefenbaker to express their displeasure. A Miami newspaper accused Canada of selling munitions and machinery to Cuba (despite the fact that Diefenbaker’s actual policy on trade with Cuba at this time expressly forbade sale of these goods). This newspaper wrote:

the letter ‘C’ stands for Cuba and Communism. It also stands for Canada. And business between Cuba and Canada is increasing daily. There’s a virtual two-way airlift between the two nations. Northbound planes carry vegetables, fruit, tobacco; southbound aircraft are loaded with ‘hard goods.’ Meaning machinery and munitions.10

It may not be surprising that a Miami newspaper took a dim view of trade between Canada and Cuba. However, many Americans outside Miami were also critical of trade between Canada and Cuba. Cartoons in American newspapers portrayed Diefenbaker as deliberately trying to get in the way of American policy towards Cuba. In one cartoon published by the Arizona Republic, Diefenbaker was shown puffing away on a cigar – which one can safely assume is Cuban – the smoke from which muddied up the

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background where Uncle Sam stands looking towards Cuba (see figure 4.1). Another
cartoon along the same lines, called “Hey Neighbour!,” from a Phoenix newspaper,
showed Canada, depicted holding a suitcase stamped “sale of goods to Castro,” headed in
one direction, with Uncle Sam and his suitcase marked “U.S. Trade Embargo on Cuba,”
headed in the other direction. Uncle Sam is looking back at where Canada is headed, and
the expression on his face is distressed. Canada is smaller and somewhat childlike in
appearance (see figure 4.2).

Others writing from the United States were also negative towards the idea of
Canada trading with Cuba. E.J. McGrath wrote from Phoenix, Arizona, expressing
resentment at being called a “pushy American” especially since he was among “those
who have made capital investments in your miserable country – the only so-called
‘sovereign nation’ which has no flag of its own, no national anthem of its own, and
doesn’t have the power to amend its own Constitution.” McGrath wrote that “we are
praying that Hees and Diefenbaker succeed in increasing your exports to Cuba to
$150,000,000.00 so we can have the pleasure of watching you squirm when you try to
cash $150,000,000.00 worth of Che Guevara’s I.O.U.s which you receive for your
exports.” Another American voice asked Diefenbaker to stop trading with Cuba
because it was simply wrong:

For the love of God and the Canadian empire stop this foolish trading with a
traitor and thief…America will never forget the…treachery of Canada in yielding
to Castro – after we have cut off trade because of his actions… How can any

from newspaper, p. 369325.
cartoon from newspaper, p. 369325A.
13 DCC, Series VI, Vol. 476, File 722/C962 Opposing – Foreign Trade by Countries – Cuba – Opposing
thinking Canadian believe that they can trade with Cuba – with American dollars stolen by the Castro henchmen. If this deal goes thru every American who has held Canada in their high esteem and love, will hate it, and when the chips are down will disown it.  

From the American perspective, the Canadian decision to trade with Cuba evoked strong negative feelings.

There were thus Americans who felt, just as some Canadians did, that Canada ought not to be trading with Cuba for reasons of morality, alliances, and general decency. Yet some letters to the Prime Minister’s office before the crisis were supportive, and encouraged Diefenbaker to maintain trade with Cuba despite American pressure. Some argued that the United States, in their attempts to tell everyone else what to do, were hypocrites. Joseph Flamer, from Montreal, argued that

> There is far too much tendency in Canada to equate American interests with Canadian interests…Following a different policy to that of the United States does not mean unfriendliness to the United States…We should certainly not be antagonistic to the United States, but by all means let us be different when our interests are different.

In a second letter to the *Montreal Star*, Flamer emphasized that the United States could not dictate with whom Canada could trade because the United States traded with both the Soviet Union and Poland: “apparently we are called upon to be holier than holy.” The oft-cited reason to suspend trade with Cuba was that failure to do so would damage the Canadian-American relationship, but he pointed out that the United States often made

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trade decisions without regard to the positions of their neighbours, and that “a modern industrialized Cuba will be a better customer for Canada.”¹⁶

Others argued that Canada needed to take an independent stand. Some were angry with Diefenbaker for not having done enough in this regard in the past; for example, in the immediate aftermath of the visit of the Cuban trade delegation to Canada. But the responses from Canadians on the issue of trade with Cuba started almost immediately after Canada began trading with Castro in 1959, and continued through the remainder of Diefenbaker’s term in office. Mrs. I Lewis, from Hamilton, Ontario, wrote that “I have just listened to the … news and you were quoted as saying ‘we may have to follow the United States’ attitude toward Cuba…Personally, I voted for you in the last election but if once again we have to echo U.S. opinions + actions, I shall not vote Conservative in the next election.”¹⁷ Others were skeptical about whether or not Canada could maintain an independent stance from the United States, but nevertheless thought it should at least try. One entry in this file was a letter addressed “Dear Leaders?” that stressed that Canada’s trade policy was no concern of the United States. “Why should Canadians continue to be the stooges of the U.S.,” this individual asked.

What harm have the Cubans ever done to Canada that you people in Ottawa, leading a so-called democracy, should kill a market that is so badly needed? Whenever the Conservatives are in power, everything goes to hell. Jobs, bank accounts + a feeling of pride in our own country.¹⁸

This letter was signed “yours disgustedly” and addressed to the Government of Canada, care of “the Departments which neglect the 600,000 or more unemployed,

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¹⁶ Ibid., 2 January 1961, p. 369031.
underprivileged, underdeveloped, uneducated Canadians, Ottawa, Ontario…State of the USA.”

However, not everyone was nearly as condematory of Diefenbaker’s actions, and there were also letters of congratulations for taking an independent stance on this issue. For example, Mrs. Gwendolyn A. Thonluern wrote that she wished to express “approval of the government’s recent stand on the issue of trade with Cuba…The issue of independence for Canadians in determining their own foreign + trade policy seems to me much more important than the problems we might face because of American displeasure. I think many Canadians see the unfairness of penalizing the Cubans more severely than other countries whose politics we dislike more.” Independence in the determination of foreign policy was the goal. Thirteen year old Michael Brady, who wrote to the Prime Minister from Saskatchewan, shared this sentiment:

I am only thirteen but I would like to express my views. I believe Canada should disregard U.S. pressure on Canadian trade with Cuba. We are not a part of the U.S. even if they do own much of our business. Canada is a free country, free to trade with whomever she wants to…I believe Fidel Castro has been driven to trading with the Soviet bloc by U.S. embargoes, Cuba can use many goods from Canada…Let’s stop pussy-footing around. If Canada is to depend on another country’s foreign policy, capital, and everything, we will never build a national character & may sooner or later become a part of the U.S.

Though one wonders why a thirteen year old would care about trade policies, the point is nevertheless valid. Another group of Canadians asked Diefenbaker for an independent policy regarding Cuba. “We residents of Muskoka,” they began, “regard the United States government’s threats against Cuba, as a grave menace to the peace and well-being

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19 Ibid.
of this hemisphere. We urge the Canadian government to take an independent, Canadian stand in this situation since Canada has no quarrel with Cuba.” They suggested that the United States’ belligerence towards Cuba was extremely dangerous, and that if Canada did not chart an independent course, it risked being drawn into an intervention there.22 This letter in particular is prescient; it was written to Diefenbaker before the April 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco, and before the Cuban missile crisis.

During and in the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, some Canadians wondered whether this event would finally cause Canada to sever relations with Cuba. One editorial in Maclean’s certainly thought that would be the case. Ken Lefolii argued that once it became clear that there were missiles in Cuba, Canada should have immediately suspended trade. Continuing relations violated Canada’s alliances. He wrote: “to suspend trade with Cuba now that we know the Cubans are pointing missiles at us is simple horse sense that will be doubly useful if it stands as a reminder that for Canada neutrality is a dangerous fiction. Canada is not a neutral nation, and the fast buck is not the highest goal of Canadian policy.”23

Others believed that there was no reason to suspend trade as a result of the crisis. After all, Canada was not violating any international laws and had long since ceased to trade strategic goods. A letter to the editor of the Toronto Daily Star asked “why should we drop trade and, in effect, sever commercial relations with Cuba, or any other country with whom we have diplomatic relations, to keep the United States happy?” The author of this letter argued that “by the same token Canada could demand the United States drop

23 Ken Lefolii, Editorial, Maclean’s, 17 November 1962, p. 4.
its trade with the USSR and its satellite countries…Good trade and commercial relations between all nations are the imperative necessity of our times. Power and trade blocs are not the answer to the world’s problems nor the creators of peace and goodwill.”

The editor of the Saskatoon Star Phoenix made an even more direct connection between the issue of trade with Cuba, American pressure, and Canadian sovereignty. Referring to Hogan’s suggestion that Canada completely sever trade relations with Canada, the editorial argued:

“this suggests that Canada’s foreign and defence policies should be geared without restraint to coincide with those of the United States…Canada may yet be able to serve as a reconciling influence in the Cuban situation, but this would be impossible if Mr. Hogan’s proposal became Canadian policy. Canada and the United States have a great communion of interest, economically, culturally and from a defence standpoint. But this must never be subordinated to our national sovereignty.”

The connection between Canadian sovereignty and maintaining trade with Cuba was direct and vital.

The Canadian policy of trade with Cuba, therefore, was not a simple matter of determining how much to buy and sell. It was complicated by the determination of how independent Canadian policy could be without doing serious damage to the Canadian-American relationship. Canadians were both for and against trade with Cuba. At the end of the day, Canada continuing to trade with Cuba (as long as no munitions or strategic goods were included) was not divisive enough to require a change in policy. The same sort of debate occurred about whether or not Canada would accept nuclear weapons, but with drastically different results.

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“No Annihilation Without Representation?” Canada and Nuclear Weapons

The history of Canadian nuclear weapons policy is complex, and although it was exacerbated by the Cuban missile crisis, it became a central issue of public discussion in the late 1950s and was only decided by Lester B. Pearson in 1963. Nevertheless, it was also a key aspect of the Cuban missile crisis, because many made the argument that if Canada was not going to accept nuclear weapons in this, crisis of all crises, then when would it? This section will briefly examine the history of Canadian nuclear weapons policy, explore the nature of the arguments made by those advocating a non-nuclear policy, and look at how the Cuban missile crisis exacerbated the situation to make it necessary for Canada to ultimately accept the warheads. Though the disarmament movement in Canada was much larger than one group, this section will focus specifically on the Voice of Women, since they received a degree of media attention in their campaign to have the government commit to a policy rejecting nuclear weapons. There were also those who wanted an independent Canadian policy refusing American nuclear warheads for the Bomarc system already on Canadian soil. However, it increasingly became clear that the ultimate price, serious discord in the Canadian-American relationship, was too high.

Pearson’s decision, not long after he assumed the Prime Minister’s office in 1963, to accept nuclear weapons, was a decision that successive governments had delayed since the end of the Second World War. Having decided not to develop an atomic bomb of its own, Canadian acceptance of American weapons was increasingly a concern in the late
1950s as a vital part of the postwar continental defence structure. After the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was formed in 1949, defining how Canada would best participate in continental defence was a subject of intense discussion and debate. By the mid-1950s there were a series of directives which committed Canada, as a member of NATO, to the use of nuclear weapons. MC 48, for example, passed in December 1954, and then MC 14/2 and MC 70 in 1957 and 1958 respectively, authorized NATO, which included Canadian forces in Europe, to use nuclear weapons. Since Canada did not object to approval of these directives, some scholars have argued that this signified a de facto agreement to becoming a nuclear power. Many thought the issue was settled when, in February 1959, Prime Minister Diefenbaker canceled the production of the Arrow interceptor aircraft and announced the adoption of the Boeing IM-99B Bomarc anti-bomber guided missile system. Since this weapon was useless unless armed with a nuclear warhead, it appeared that Diefenbaker had accepted nuclear weapons for Canada.

What happened next is part of the “dithering Diefenbaker” legend. Perhaps he believed that having Bomars did not necessitate having their warheads, or perhaps he

26 For the reasons why Canada did not develop its own atomic weapon, see Brian Buckley, Canada’s Early Nuclear Policy: Fate, Chance and Character (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), pp. 138-9.
27 There was both American thinking on this matter as well as homegrown Canadian ideas on what Canada’s role in defence should be. See Andrew Richter, Avoiding Armageddon: Canadian Military Strategy and Nuclear Weapons 1950-63 (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2002).
29 Ibid., pp. 48-9. The cancellation of the Arrow program was extremely controversial and is one of the most momentous decisions of Diefenbaker’s time in office. Even though most military sources agreed that the Arrow was fast becoming obsolete and the Canadian military needed a surface-to-air system, there remains doubt as to whether or not the Arrow still could have been useful. In addition, a number of people were laid off after the decision was made. For a discussion of this decision and its ramifications see Richter, pp. 48-54.
30 Richter, Avoiding Armageddon, p. 81.
started to change his mind. Some argued that a fundamental lack of courage as a leader led to his bargaining “in bad faith with the United States.”31 Others have argued that the political terrain began to change, with the appointment of Howard Green to the Department of External Affairs, and that Diefenbaker believed that the disarmament movement was stronger and more influential than it actually was. 32 Patricia McMahon has shown this so-called indecision was also a matter of giving too much importance to the mail he received. Of that there was plenty, which made Diefenbaker believe Canadians were against nuclear weapons. McMahon argues that public opinion in the late 1950s and into the early 1960s was actually increasingly in favour of nuclear weapons. 33

What did Diefenbaker hear from Canadian citizens that made him believe that general public was against acquiring nuclear weapons from the United States? Even before the Cuban missile crisis, some Canadians insisted that nuclear weapons were dangerous and that Canada should set an example by promising never to allow them into the country. Specifically referring to Canada’s commitments to NATO, Tom Findlay wrote to the Prime Minister claiming that “our government is nothing but a U.S. puppet. Lets [sic] get out of N.A.T.O. before that goofy Kennedy blows us to hell for the sake of a few votes.”34 Another individual wrote to Diefenbaker about the general dangers of nuclear testing and the implications of the American position on Berlin. “As a Canadian, as a father, as a physician, as a citizen of the world,” he wrote,

32 Trudgen, p. 49.
I urge you to stand up and speak out against nuclear bomb-testing and sabre-rattling to achieve the aims of the West. The United States needs good counsel from Canada. The United States needs to be told that any amount of compromise is better than an atomic holocaust. The United States needs to be told that Canada stands for a ban on all nuclear weapons-testing. The United States needs to be told that it is better to lose face over Berlin, over a thousand Berliners, than to sacrifice the lives of millions of people and to jeopardize the very continuance of life on earth...It is time for Canada to speak for itself.35

This author felt strongly about nuclear weapons testing and wanted Canada to exert itself to keep the United States in check.

In late October and into November 1962, letters to the Prime Minister’s Office and in newspapers across the country continued in the same vein. Margaret J. Armstrong wrote to the Prime Minister that she wanted to “commend you and your government on the fine moderate way you have dealt with the Cuban crisis. We like to stand by our friends but can hardly cheer them on when they break the law” (referring to the dubious legality of Kennedy’s blockade). She “hope[d] Canada will never accept nuclear arms on her soil. We cannot bomb our way to peace.”36 Another letter to Diefenbaker commended him for the same thing, though this time it was a Canadian citizen who was living in Austin, Texas.

I applaud your refusal to allow nuclear weapons into Canada despite considerable pressure to the contrary. I wholeheartedly support your policy of maintaining Canada as a non-nuclear country, as nuclear weapons in Canada would help little in the defense of this hemisphere, would only serve to heighten world tensions, and would weaken Canada’s growing position as an arbiter in world disputes.37

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These individuals believed that Canada had more legitimacy as a potential arbiter and peacemaker if it did not possess nuclear weapons. This is a theme that will be discussed in much greater detail in chapter five. To these Canadians, possession of nuclear weapons meant that any semblance of neutrality, and thus influence, was lost.

During the crisis, citizens wrote to various newspapers expressing their concern over Canada’s potential acquisition of American nuclear weapons, arguing that nuclear weapons on Canadian soil would not result in a peaceful solution to the crisis. One individual, who signed her letter “Disgusted Woman,” expressed her frustration at the futility of the situation. “Sir,” she wrote, “the extreme crisis brought about in the blockade of Cuba last week once again points up Canada’s complete dependence on the United States in almost all matters, especially defence. It is quite obvious that, whatever the decision made on atomic weapons, the people of Canada are in the middle and we’ll definitely get hurt no matter who starts the shooting war.” Canada was indeed geographically in the middle between the United States and Soviet Union, and an attack from the latter could come from the north. However, she goes on to assert sarcastically that “all right, we haven’t any say in the matter, that is obvious; but we can choose to retaliate or not, and I, being a very vindictive type, say let’s at least give our armed forces the weapons to retaliate for our country’s destruction. I definitely won’t die happy as the victim of some other country’s decisions but I’ll die a bit happier if I know the other side got a taste of Canadian steel.”

Diefenbaker was well aware of anti-nuclear sentiments in Canada both before and during the Cuban missile crisis. Many Canadians wrote letters to him and to their

newspapers protesting the acquisition of nuclear weapons, especially since that meant ties to the United States would increase even more. However, the most vocal and certainly best organized group was the Voice of Women (VOW). The VOW was formed in June 1960 in Toronto and quickly expanded to the rest of Canada as well as internationally. They were “born of a sense of urgency” according to Candace Loewen, who argues that they were important to Canada’s early peace movement. Frances Early argues that VOW was “born out of rage and hope” as well as a desire “to combat the popular impression that nothing could be done to prevent the drift towards nuclear war.” For the first few years of their existence, they were committed to educating themselves on nuclear war, disarmament and peace. They projected the image of citizen-mothers whose authenticity and authority came from their fervent desire to protect the future of the world for their children. They were also allied with the center/left, with prominent members married to politicians from the Liberal party (Mrs. Maryon Pearson, for example) and, in Regina at least, labour groups.

From their beginning, VOW made it clear that they were a peace oriented group, dedicated to disarmament and keeping nuclear weapons out of Canada, and their representatives wasted no time in contacting government members. Shortly after their

43 Candace Loewen, “Mike Hears Voices: Voice of Women and Lester Pearson, 1960-1963” *Atlantis* 12, 2 (Spring 1987) and Cotcher, “National Organization in A Prairie City.” It seems as though this is the only study of one of the local VOW branches, but the groups existed all over the country and had international ties as well.
inaugural meeting in July 1960, they sent a telegram to Hazen Argue, parliamentary
leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), announcing their existence
and intentions. “At a large representative inaugural meeting Voice of Women
unanimously declared themselves opposed to nuclear war” they wrote. “We support any
proposal which will keep Canada free from nuclear armament thereby strengthening
Canada’s leadership role among non-nuclear powers.”

This was the opening bell of
their campaign for nuclear disarmament and they wasted no time in recruiting more
members, initiating a letter-writing campaign, and recruiting high-profile sponsors.

In
their first newsletter, Muriel Jacobson, International Affairs Chairman and Josephine
Davis, Vice-President and Chairman of Campaign Committee, informed their members
that they should waste no time in writing to three politicians in particular – Hazen Argue,
Howard Green, and Lester Pearson – since they were in the midst of a Commons debate
on defense appropriations. They contacted Pearson, outlined their position and asked
for his support. Since he had made his anti-nuclear weapons position clear, he willingly
gave it. Within a few years, they would be bitterly disappointed with this particular
politician, but for now, he and his wife were among their most well-known supporters.

Between their formation in June 1960 and the outbreak of the Cuban missile crisis
in October 1962, the VOW were active in various ways. Protest and direct political
involvement was deemphasized, however; many members of VOW believed their

sent to Hazen Argue, House of Commons, 29 July 1960.
45 In addition to Lester Pearson’s wife, they attempted to recruit Olive Diefenbaker. She respectfully
deprecated, believing her membership would be a conflict of interest. See LAC, Voice of Women Fonds, Vol.
1 File Correspondence Members of Parliament 1960-1963, Letter from Mrs. Olive Diefenbaker to VOW, 8
August 1960.
from Muriel Jacobsen and Josephine Davis to membership, 30 July 1960.
47 Loewen, “Mike Hears Voices.”
authority and authenticity sprang from their position as respectable women, and that any “militancy” would ruin that reputation.48 Others within the group favoured a more direct approach. Regardless of which faction was responsible, VOW nevertheless made themselves and their objectives clear and sent a delegation to Ottawa in March 1962. They asked the government to support disarmament and permanently join the non-nuclear club. Their brief, written for the occasion, asked Prime Minister Diefenbaker to use whatever influence he had to get Kennedy to stop nuclear weapons testing, and support disarmament discussions in the United Nations. They promised that “we shall continue to come from time to time, and in increasing numbers, as do women in other countries who seek from their leaders similar positive steps.”49 Come again they did, immediately after the Cuban missile crisis on 1 November 1962, and this time, with significantly more media attention.

During the crisis, members of the VOW – particularly those from Quebec – were dismayed. They recognized that the crisis would prove a catalyst for nuclear policy, and quickly organized a “Peace Train.” This peace train started out in Montreal and made its way to Ottawa, picking up at least three hundred passengers on the way.50 Once there, they marched to Parliament Hill and met with Howard Green. Their brief noted that

the tense and dangerous world situation…has impelled us again to request an audience with our Government…in acquiring for Canadian forces weapons designed for nuclear arms let us admit we made a mistake. Let us scrap them as we did the Arrow. We are unalterably opposed to the spread of nuclear armaments to any country not now possessing them. We are convinced that it is

49 LAC, Voice of Women fonds, Vol. 5 File Briefs and Statements, 1962. Brief to the Prime Minister, presented on March 7th 1962 by Mrs. Helen Tucker President and Mrs. Thérèse Casgrain Vice-President.
50 Candace Loewen puts the number at three hundred, though press accounts of the time vary between three and four hundred. See Loewen, “Making Ourselves Heard,” p. 250.
only as a non nuclear power that Canada can play a positive and constructive intermediary role in world affairs.\textsuperscript{51}

They demanded that any treaties already in existence which committed Canada to the use of nuclear weapons had to be altered, since it was against the cause of peace to even think of fulfilling them.

News reporters covered the meeting in detail, but stories varied from newspaper to newspaper. Editorials appeared throughout the country which applauded the VOW for their good intentions. While they certainly enjoyed some public support, there was also considerable backlash against their anti-nuclear position. Charles Lynch covered the meeting in a relatively objective and neutral manner. He wrote about the general support Green received, not surprising since he was a well-known advocate of disarmament, but also how, as the meeting went on, the women gave him a “hard time” on nuclear weapons. “This was the first time the VOW had adopted a flat ban-the-bomb position and the first time it had mounted so direct an attack on Canada’s NATO and NORAD alliances.” He noted that Green did not give the women a promise that Canada would never allow nuclear weapons on its soil, but the VOW delegates “weren’t having it.” He also reported that the applause for Green by the end of the meeting was tangibly less than at the beginning.\textsuperscript{52}

While Lynch’s coverage of the VOW delegation’s meeting with Green was relatively neutral, others were not so kind. An editorial in the same newspaper claimed this group represented only the voice of some women. “There was something

\textsuperscript{51} LAC, Voice of Women fonds, Vol. 5 File Briefs and Statements 1962, Brief to Prime Minister Diefenbaker, 26 October 1962 by Mme. Thérèse Casgrain, President.

pathetically foolish about the appearance at the Parliament buildings in Ottawa the other day of a group of matrons styling themselves with the pompous and absurdly unappealing title of the Voice of Women.” This editorial called them busybodies, accused them of luring Canada into military unpreparedness, and concluded that “such nonsense indulged in by a bumptious minority not only reflects on the intelligence of Canadian women in general, it also downgrades the prestige and dignity of the nation.” The reaction from readers was swift and vocal, however, and many defended the VOW’s actions. One individual wrote to rebut the “warped editorial,” since “this, to me, is typical of your low level of reporting. I say ‘Bravo’ to these wonderful, courageous women, who stand up against the tide of popular opinion and condemn war of any sort. What earthly good are nuclear weapons to a small nation like Canada?” Another letter, signed “A True Canadian” defended the group as well, since this individual viewed with shock and disgust your vicious attack on that sincere group…you might be surprised how many people share the views and hopes of this group with regard to nuclear weapons. How can you justify that it is right for Canada to accept nuclear arms from the United States and wrong for Cuba to accept them from Russia?…you are a mouthpiece for United States propaganda.

The VOW was also accused of actively trying to undermine national defence, being Communist-influenced, and exhibiting a lack of patriotism. One individual wrote to the *Edmonton Journal* to claim that the Voice of Women “is only spreading fear. Its utterances against arming and against President Kennedy’s stopping Russian might in Cuba remind me of the old saying about biting the hand that feeds you. In this case, the

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hand protects us.”

Another individual was angered by the implication that if the Voice of Women worked for peace, then others worked for war. Yet another wrote that “despite the seriousness of the present world situation… the Voice of Women still wishes to see Canadian military personnel without adequate weapons. Next time the VOW has a peace train, let it think of the men who died to keep that country strong and free.”

The reporting regarding the VOW trip to Ottawa was sparked by a number of factors. Obviously, the world had just survived a tense situation and tempers were high. The timing was not great; statements like the last one were probably at least partly fuelled by the fact that Remembrance Day was just around the corner and memories of war were close to the surface. The Voice of Women thought that since the world had only barely survived nuclear catastrophe, now was the time for nuclear disarmament. However, Patricia McMahon has argued that some believed that the risk of nuclear war was lower than ever. Kennedy and Khrushchev had demonstrated that even when staring at each other across the so-called brink, cooler heads could prevail. Such a situation could be managed, and perhaps defending oneself with nuclear weapons was not that bad after all. Newspapers, individuals and, increasingly, government leaders, started to argue that Canada now more than ever needed to accept American nuclear weapons. One poll showed that 41% of the nation agreed that the military forces in both Canada and Europe

57 Letter to the editor from Margaret Gaudrea, Montreal Gazette, 22 November 1962, p. 6.
58 Letter to the editor from G.E. Hopkins, Winnipeg Free Press, 10 November 1962, p. 58.
should have atomic weapons. Not exactly a majority, but only 17% believed that they should not.⁶⁰

There were a few different arguments made in favour of Canada’s acquisition of nuclear weapons. The first, discussed at length in the press, was that Canada was the only gap in North America’s defences. At the end of November, the Montreal Gazette covered a story in which Retired Air Marshal W.A. Curtis said that “failure of Canada to equip its Voodoo interceptor aircraft and Bomarc missiles with nuclear warheads has made the area defended by Canada ‘the only gap in the entire North American defence system.’”⁶¹ This gap meant that Canada was not fulfilling its end of the NATO and NORAD agreements. A letter to the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press argued that, as the only member of NATO not fulfilling its part in the alliance, Canada was vulnerable to accusations of hypocrisy: “our official ‘position’ seems to suggest that if our borders were threatened, our southern neighbors are obliged to do our fighting for us, with maybe a little help from us. But if the U.S. borders are exposed to danger, we can outrightly refuse any help asked for, and refuse moral support as well.” This author noted that despite nationalistic feelings, American investment was vital and standing against them in this matter could not be considered.⁶² Another story, published the Halifax Chronicle Herald and written by Knowlton Nash (from Washington), questioned Canada’s value as a continental defence partner. He implied that NORAD might need to reassess Canada’s effectiveness as a defence partner. He wrote, “the hesitancy of the Canadian government to move fast in the crisis insofar as NORAD is concerned has aroused speculation on two

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⁶⁰ John Paul and Jerome Laulicht, In Your Opinion: Leaders’ and Voters’ Attitudes on Defence and Disarmament (Clarkson, Ontario: Canadian Peace Research Institute, 1963, p. 84.
possibilities: either arrangements be made for faster political response from Canada, or else the United States proceed on the assumption that Canada will be of little or no help in an emergency.” He concluded that “the lack of nuclear defensive weaponry leaves a serious hole in North American defence.”

A related argument in post-missile crisis debates was that Diefenbaker needed to define a clear defence policy. His hesitation during the crisis and the deepening split in the Cabinet between Harkness and Green were frequently discussed in the national press. In December, the Globe and Mail reported that the Canadian Labour Congress asked Diefenbaker to clarify his defence policy, since “lack of precision, clarity and direction in the defense policy is disturbing to Canadians and to Canada’s friends and has become a liability in time of crisis.” They wanted Diefenbaker to make a decision, one way or the other, regarding nuclear weapons. The Regina Leader-Post also published an editorial which argued that Canada’s defence policies were put to the test in the Cuban missile crisis and they had failed: “there is no room for pride in the part we played…Non-partisan action to fashion a truly effective defence policy – one that must find a solution for the nuclear weapons dilemma – might be a way out of the present impasse. It is worth a trial in the hope that it will end the present vacillation and muddling and assure not only a more effective contribution by Canada to the defences of this continent, but more effective defences for our homes and our people.” This is what it came down to.

In the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, people did not feel safer, they felt more at

risk than ever, and their current government proved indecisive, even weeks after the crisis.

In the wake of this public discussion, Pearson reassessed his policy on the acquisition of nuclear weapons for Canadian forces. Assisted by opinion polls (which Diefenbaker never trusted), he was able to take a more accurate reading of the country’s overall opinion in favour of accepting American nuclear warheads for Canadian Bomars and Voodoo interceptors. At the end of the day, unlike trade with Cuba, this was an issue on which Kennedy, and a growing number of Canadians, insisted. Independence from American influence, especially when the Canadian armed forces already possessed the weapons systems, which were sitting on Canadian bases and were useless without their warheads, was not acceptable. Dissent within his cabinet, and Defence Minister Harkness’ resignation, contributed to Diefenbaker’s downfall in the vote of non-confidence held on 5 February 1963. Lester Pearson had publicly changed his policy regarding nuclear weapons, and asserted several times, simply and frankly, that if elected he would settle the matter once and for all. He was elected in April 1963, and by August the House of Commons voted to accept nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. Canada’s military remained a nuclear force until 1984.

Consultation Between Allies

During the missile crisis, many Canadians also discussed the Canadian-American relationship more generally. They debated whether or not Canada ought to have supported their American allies without question, or whether this was the time for Canada

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to assert an independent policy. While some wanted a strong leader who would assert their nation’s independence from the American behemoth, others felt that a time of possible nuclear crisis was not appropriate for nationalist displays of independence. On the other hand, when would be a better time than a global crisis to demonstrate that Canada determined its own foreign policy?

This section will examine the range of public discussion on the issue. Those who supported Diefenbaker and wrote letters to him and to newspapers to make their views known focused on different themes. Some supported Diefenbaker’s claim that Canada should have been consulted. Others agreed that Kennedy broke the law and was taking revenge on Cuba. Still others declared that America was a bully and Canada needed to act in its own interests. However, public discussion ultimately condemned Diefenbaker for disappointing Kennedy and the United States. This was evident in public reaction to Howard Green’s television interview on Wednesday during the crisis. Increasingly, depictions of Diefenbaker as hesitant and ineffective appeared in print sources, and conversely, Kennedy was increasingly being shown as a brave young hero. This section examines the contours of this discussion during and after the Cuban missile crisis to determine what it reveals about the nature of the Canadian-American relationship.

By way of introduction to this large and complex issue, consider the protest held at the University of British Columbia during the missile crisis. The protest was organized by the UBC Nuclear Disarmament Club and the Student Christian Movement, and attended by approximately 5,000 students. The student newspaper, *Ubyssey*, claimed it was largely an anti-American rally. The five professors who spoke denounced American
“military action as a solution to world disorder.”67 According to this story, the professors all argued that military might was not the solution and that peaceful negotiation was the only way out of the present situation. This journalist wrote that “only one person, a student, took the platform to argue in favor of the U.S. quarantine on Cuba.”68

Although this rally was described in chapter two, press coverage of the event can tell us a good deal about the scope of public reaction. In their anti-American sentiments, the professors were an example of one strand of public opinion, and in the backlash against them, we can see how these sentiments interacted with other threads of Canadian public opinion. Given that there were at least a few thousand students present, it is unlikely that there were absolutely no Kennedy supporters. Nevertheless, the panel was critical of the American president’s actions and argued that his actions were extremely dangerous. Dr. Norman Epstein from Applied Science was concerned with the horrors of war and the fact that the crisis left people feeling like there was nothing they could do to avert it. Dr. Donald Brown pointed out that students and professors had to get involved, to inform themselves on what was happening and to think critically. Most strongly worded was the statement from Dr. James Foulkes, who pointed out that what was happening in Cuba could have significant ramifications in Berlin. He also noted that “I believe that in their hearts, whatever their feelings towards Castro may be, most Canadians will resent any unilateral restrictions on our own international rights as well as those of others.”69

68 Ibid.
Thus, the professors were critical of the possibility of nuclear war which they felt Kennedy’s actions had created. However, a letter to the editor of the student newspaper later that week indicated that student opinion was mixed. E.M. Hepner, a graduate student in the political science department, wrote:

As a student who attended Wednesday’s rally ‘for peace’ at UBC I wish to make it clear that contrary to the impression given by news reports not all students supported the panel’s anti-Kennedy stand. In fact, the panel failed to sway most of the 3,000 students to an outright condemnation of the United States as witnessed by the lack of interest in the anti-Kennedy petition circulated…The news reports did not mention that some of the loudest cheers were given to the students who spoke in support of Kennedy over the protest of the panel.70

This graduate student was not alone in his or her sentiments. Other professors argued that the rally was neither balanced nor an accurate sample of campus opinion on the issue. A *Vancouver Sun* story reported the opinions of three professors who condemned the leaders of the rally and asserted that while they respected the right of those (original) five professors to state their opinion, they did not represent the faculty as a whole.71

The protest rally at the University of British Columbia was an example of anti-American views. Canadian public opinion diverged on the morality of the American quarantine on Cuba as well as on what Canada’s relationship with the United States ought to be. One current of opinion condemned the American action. Terry Nugent’s comments, for example, received some support. Chapter two described Nugent’s comments, which strongly condemned Kennedy’s interference in Cuba. He believed that Cuba, as a sovereign nation, should be allowed to take whatever precautions it believed were necessary for its own defence. The statement caused a stir in the newspapers.

Some agreed and saw the correlation between the American attempt to tell a smaller nation (Cuba) what to do, and thus the ability to dominate a larger but not that much more politically powerful nation (Canada). The Globe and Mail reported that after his speech, Nugent received 30 telegrams from citizens, 29 of which were strongly supportive. The Prime Minister’s office also received a number of letters supporting Nugent’s comments. One such letter was sent by local farmers; one wrote to Diefenbaker to tell him that “many of my fellow farmers share my pleasure with the timely statement of Terry Nugent M.P. regarding the ill advised U.S. foreign policy…the average farmer, or the man in the street is fed up with the newspaper malarkey that all the blame is with Cuba and Russia, and the U.S.A. is a shining paragon.” Another citizen wrote into the Edmonton Journal to congratulate Nugent for transcending party lines: “Mr. Nugent did better than that. He spoke for himself, for his country, for our world.” Support for his statements also came from further afield than Edmonton. M. Lamb wrote to the editor of the Winnipeg Free Press congratulating Nugent for having the courage to stand up for what he believed was right, and asserted that “he will go down in history as a man who put loyalty to Canada and its honor as a member of the United Nations…ahead of personal considerations and the ‘higher loyalty’ to the selfish interests of the United States. So far he is the only member of the Canadian House of Commons and not of the Congress of the U.S.A.”

Diefenbaker and others also argued that Canada was under no obligation to follow the American lead on this issue, since there had been no consultation. Kennedy’s

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74 Letter to editor from C. Frank Lawrence, Edmonton Journal, 27 October 1962, p. 4.
decision to blockade Cuba was bad enough, but the American assumption that Canada would support this action without consulting the Canadian government was unforgiveable. This view of the crisis has recently been re-examined by Asa McKercher. He argues that the Canadian government played a more supportive role in the crisis than scholars have recognized.\(^76\) Canada’s military went on alert (although this was initially done, as others have shown, without official approval),\(^77\) Soviet and Cuban flights in Canadian airspace were stopped, and the Department of External Affairs cooperated with its American counterpart.\(^78\) And yet the argument that Canada was not fully consulted and therefore its cooperation could not be taken for granted persisted in public forums. It is worth asking why this issue continued to be raised. What was it about the perceived lack of consultation that bothered Diefenbaker and some Canadians so much?

Diefenbaker, as we have seen, was not a fan of Kennedy to begin with. In his memoirs Diefenbaker wrote that the difference between true consultation and the presentation of one’s allies with a *fait accompli* was an important distinction.\(^79\) This was an important issue for Diefenbaker, and other political leaders picked up on it as well. The *Ottawa Citizen* reported that even after Diefenbaker finally made a statement of support, MP (NDP) H.W. Herridge said “the U.S. had taken unilateral action which ‘could easily lead ‘ to war, without consulting its North Atlantic Treaty partners beforehand.”\(^80\) Although Diefenbaker eventually decided that the public outcry for a


\(^{77}\) Haydon, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*.

\(^{78}\) McKercher, “Half-Hearted Response?”


clear statement of support was too great to continue to prevaricate, he could not forget Kennedy’s arrogance.

The lack of consultation argument was made even by individuals who supported Kennedy’s action regarding Cuba. The editor of the Montreal Gazette, for instance, wrote that Kennedy did not truly consult any NATO ally, because if he had, he would not have been able to act quickly. The editorial implied that swiftness of action was the reason for the crisis’ peaceful resolution.81 This individual thought that the lack of consultation was a necessary evil, but others disagreed. Another commentator, Arthur Blakely, noted there was no consultation over Cuba and that Kennedy’s “success” should not be celebrated. Rather, it was cause for deep concern, since “that very success can serve to encourage other massive interventions launched without the benefit of consultation.”82 Another letter in this newspaper insisted “no annihilation without representation.”83

This matter was central after former President Truman publically scolded Canada for not supporting Kennedy. He claimed that Canada’s actions were shameful in comparison to the manner in which the Latin American countries, through the OAS, supported the American action. In response, the Toronto Daily Star ran an editorial that summarized the lack of consultation argument quite clearly:

We wonder if it has occurred to Mr. Truman, or to the other American critics, that one cause for this lack of enthusiasm may be that Canada was not consulted before President Kennedy announced his intention of blockading Cuba. The safety of this country is just as much involved as that of the United States in a potential showdown with the Soviet Union. Yet our government’s opinion was

not asked, nor was it even given advance information. This is not the way to obtain the willing co-operation of allies.\(^8^4\)

Those who supported Diefenbaker’s desire to chart an independent path also argued that Kennedy was simply taking revenge against Cuba. Some believed that Kennedy was trying to avenge the United States for the embarrassment of the Bay of Pigs, or perhaps because Cuba defied the United States by virtue of its mere existence as a Soviet ally and self-declared socialist government so close to America’s own borders. Whatever the motivation, Kennedy’s actions bordered on violating international law.

Most articulate on this subject was a letter from Byron F. Tanner in Calgary, Alberta, who wrote to Diefenbaker insisting that Kennedy had violated the law. He wrote that there were indeed “various acts of aggression and violations of international law by the Kennedy government” with respect to Cuba. The United States was guilty of aggression at the Bay of Pigs, of violating Cuba’s airspace, and of blockading Cuba. The latter contradicted the United States Constitution, Neutrality Laws, the United National Charter and the Charter of the Organization of American States.\(^8^5\) An editorial in the *Toronto Star* concurred with this assessment. The situation was extremely dangerous, but “what makes the president’s decision particularly rash and dangerous is that it rests on a very shaky foundation in international law.”\(^8^6\) The *Ottawa Citizen* noted that Kennedy’s actions violated the “principle of the freedom of the seas, a principle for which the United States has fought since the country’s beginnings.”\(^8^7\)

governments were both aware of the dubious legality of the blockade, and one of the key reasons why Americans called it a quarantine, or a “limited blockade” was because a blockade was an act of war.\(^88\)

The final strand of arguments made against the American action encompasses previous arguments. The belief that the United States was needlessly flexing its muscles, and that Canada needed to determine what was best for its own security and policy emerged in many public discussions. This position can be summarized by one particularly astute individual, who demanded to know “how can Canada, in its own best interests and using logic, be the tail of every kite the Americans choose to fly?” This letter, penned by Mrs. W. Walsh, reminded Diefenbaker that “Canadian governments are elected to look after the best interest of Canadians, not Americans.” She continued: “can we jump up and down like puppets on a string every time they change their mind?”\(^89\)

On the other hand, some argued that Kennedy was right and it was vital to protect the western hemisphere from Communist aggression. This was, after all, the height of the Cold War, and many Canadians were just as alarmed by missiles in Cuba as were Americans. Therefore, while some argued that Canada needed to assert an independent policy and put the bossy Americans in their place, others believed that Canada was not doing enough to support its major ally. This was shown by hostile reactions to Howard Green’s interview, the argument that Diefenbaker’s leadership was faltering, and in the argument that Canada had a duty to support its allies over all else.

\(^{88}\) In *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*, eds. Earnest R. May and Philip D. Zeikow, Cambridge and London: Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), Kennedy dictated that they needed to make clear that it was not a war or a war-like action; it was a limited blockade for a limited purpose, p. 172.

Howard Green’s interview with Depoe and Lynch also became a lightning rod for this discussion of Canadian-American relations. During the interview, Green was accused of sidestepping questions rather than answering them. He tried to convey a message to the Canadian public about decisiveness and support of allies without fully committing Canada to a course of action. The result was the public face of the Diefenbaker government looked indecisive and prevaricating. No wonder the public response to this interview was puzzled, at best, and outright hostile, at worst. However, if we place this interview in the context of this discussion of Canadian-American relations, we can understand some of the reaction. Those who wrote to the Prime Minister’s office rebuked both Diefenbaker and Green for the appearance, but the biggest concern was that Canada had not yet voiced full support of the American action. One citizen demanded to know by return collect telegram what the government was doing.90 A letter to the editor of the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* noted that “in answering these questions, Mr. Green proved himself to be an expert at evading the questions entirely and remaining almost non-committal” and demanded to know “is this the sort of leadership we are getting and can expect in the months to come from the present federal administration? It is one thing to be cautious in replying to questions asked by the press; it is something else to be obstinately mute…”91 Newspapers across the country carried reports of what Green said, or rather did not say, and many more letters to the editor complained that he refused to take a clear stand.

Public response to the interview was less than positive. One individual wrote to the Prime Minister expressing satisfaction with Green’s interview, because it showed that the press was indeed not running the country. This favorable response, however, was in the minority. The *Edmonton Journal* was probably the most kind; they classified Green’s answers as “sidestepping” the questions. Others were less objective. Two individuals from Toronto wrote that “it was a humiliating experience to listen to Mr. Howard Green on television last night in his…pussy-footed interview. We are outraged to think that this exhibition of short-sighted stupidity emanated from the government of Canada – which seems to have learned nothing from the tragic consequences of trying appeasement on a bully before both World Wars.”

Another, from Kitchener, Ontario, wished to go on record after watching Foreign Affairs Minister Greene [sic] being interviewed on T.V. tonight as protesting along with the two interviewers that neither Mr. Greene [sic] nor the Canadian Government has made a clear statement that we stand behind the U.S.A. absolutely in this recent Cuban Crisis. Lacking a vote in O.A.S. which indicated a clear support of the U.S. by most countries in the Americas, we should have indicated our support in an equally firm statement.

Probably the strongest response was from G. H. Parker in Winnipeg, who telegraphed Diefenbaker that “after having seen tonights television appearance of your repeat your Foreign Minister with Depoe and Lynch I as a Canadian must protest to the inept inaccurate and truly evasive and unCanadian attitude taken by Green. We as Canadians must take a definite step and back the United States in their action against the

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Communists.” He asked to be advised by return telegram “if the Canadian government is backing or reneging against our free world obligations.”

Some Canadians believed that Canada needed to support the United States unequivocally. An informal (and extremely unrepresentative) “man-in-the-street poll” taken in Calgary during the crisis showed support for Kennedy’s actions during the crisis. A sampling of thirty people, supposedly “of all ages in many occupations as they went to work” supported the President’s actions, with “only one man in complete opposition to the President’s announced ‘quarantine’ of Cuba.” Also on Tuesday, the editor of the Calgary Herald wrote a piece on Kennedy’s “bold decision” praising him for the swift and decisive action towards the Soviet Union. The strong move had a good chance of being effective, and “over-riding interests of national and hemispheric security appear to have left President Kennedy no alternative but to take the course he has taken in imposing an arms quarantine on Cuba.” The piece congratulated Kennedy for setting aside “international niceties,” and to take any other course of action would be nothing short of dereliction of duty. He concluded that “every free nation should breathe a little easier to know it has firm leadership in the White House. There hasn’t seemed to me much in Ottawa lately, or in London for that matter…But when national security is at stake, sentiment and dewy-eyed idealism are luxuries which cannot be afforded.” Other political leaders were thus rebuked, and Kennedy congratulated for his bold actions.

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97 That is not to say, however, that all Calgarians or westerners were in support of Kennedy. In fact, the prairies provinces were generally Diefenbaker strongholds. The pro-Kennedy stance of the Calgary Herald suggests only that the editorial board was pro-Kennedy, and there is no evidence to suggest this is a larger regional phenomena.
98 Editorial, Calgary Herald, 23 October 1962, p. 4.
Later in the week, this newspaper continued its assault on Ottawa, arguing that there was no doubt that the majority of Canadians supported Kennedy right from the beginning, “but as day succeeded day this past week, there was no clear evidence that the government of Canada shared this sentiment…At such a time as this Canadians surely don’t expect too much when they ask for a strong clear voice uttering plain statements of facts from Ottawa. Must their ears always be attuned to Washington for leadership?”

During the crisis, many newspaper editorials called for immediate, firm, and unequivocal support for the United States. The Calgary Herald was one of these voices. This newspaper argued that “Canada’s duty in the current crisis over Cuba is to give unqualified support to the United States in the arms quarantine of Cuba…Canada is morally and geographically committed to endorse President Kennedy’s actions.”

Thus, geographical proximity and a moral commitment were the two most pressing reasons for Canada to support the United States. The Winnipeg Free Press, notoriously anti-Diefenbaker in its outlook, called this a “testing time” of Canada’s commitments. This paper noted that Monday night the leaders of the political parties all stood up and said this was a time to support their friends, but that “parliament would have to reflect Canadian instincts more accurately had it spontaneously affirmed this country’s fidelity to its neighbour and to the principle of collective security.” Thus, for some commentators, relations between Canada and the United States were governed by duty. They believed that Canada’s responsibilities towards the United States were a matter of national honour.

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99 Editorial, Calgary Herald, 26 October 1962, p. 4.
100 Editorial, Calgary Herald, 24 October 1962, p. 4.
Finally, a letter from David Young in Saint John, New Brunswick, summarized the arguments made by this group of Canadians. This individual demanded to know “why is our government so darn slow to back up the United States of America on the Cuba problem?” He continued:

Why put the heavy burden on United States to defend the North American Continent? Why can’t Canada help also to defend this part of the world, if the time ever comes? … Canada needs United States, and United States needs Canada. We need one another, never hesitate to help our friends next door.¹⁰²

There were, therefore, Canadians who believed that the Cuban missile crisis showed Canada to be the weaker partner in the Canadian-American relationship, and that Canada ought to have acted to support the American position much more quickly.

**Conclusion**

In the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis, a cartoon appeared in many newspapers which showed a wide-eyed Diefenbaker watching a poker game between Kennedy and Khrushchev in which both leaders went “all in.”¹⁰³ Castro watched from behind Khrushchev to see the result of this gamble. Diefenbaker does not look as calm and confident as any of the other three; even Castro is depicted in a more flattering light. Beside Kennedy, rather than behind him, as Castro is behind Khrushchev, Diefenbaker looks as though he is waiting to see the results of the bet before he takes a side (see figure 4.3).

The cartoon highlights some key anxieties that Canadians felt about relations with the United States during the missile crisis. Many Canadians were vocal on trade with Cuba, American domination of Canadian foreign policy, and Canadian acquisition of American nuclear weapons. Trade was a sensitive issue, because some felt that Canada should be able to trade with whomever it pleased, and while there were those who were strongly against trading with communist Cuba, others disliked the idea of the United States telling Canada with whom they could or could not trade. It was often understood to be a matter of national pride and sovereignty. Nuclear weapons were also a major issue, but one on which the United States felt much more strongly. Many argued that the Canadian government (by virtue of its willingness to be a part of the organization) had de facto accepted nuclear responsibility within NATO, which problematic as it was for many Canadians, was nevertheless true. Diefenbaker’s continued prevarication angered the United States. The lack of a clear nuclear weapons policy thus came to a head during the crisis. If Canada would not step up and accept its responsibilities during an international situation which could have started a nuclear war, then when would it? Ultimately, Diefenbaker’s government was defeated over the issue.

Finally, the Cuban missile crisis highlighted the split in the public mood regarding Canadian-American relations. Some insisted that the Cuban missile crisis was as good a time as any to assert an independent national policy, and take whatever course the Canadian government deemed in its own best interests. Other Canadians believed that their first responsibility and duty was owed to the United States and continental defence. Whether they were supportive or critical of the American position, they understood it and Canada’s reaction to it in a highly politicized manner. Some advocated a strongly
independent position, but many also believed that position could not be taken if national and continental security were to be sacrificed in the process. There is yet one more important facet to Canada’s experience of the missile crisis. The next chapter will examine the role that Canadians believed they had, or at least ought to have, in the successful resolution of the missile crisis.
Chapter Five – “Let Canada’s Be A Peaceful Contribution to World Affairs:” Canada as a Peaceable Middle Power and the Cuban Missile Crisis

On 31 October 1962, the Regina Leader-Post ran an article which connected the recent missile crisis with Canadian culture and identity. Called, “Distinctively Canadian,” the editorial told the history of “Canadian clubs,” which were created in the late nineteenth century to foster interest and discussion in Canadian issues, for “awakening and maintaining a sense of Canadian identity and unity.” However, most remarkable were the opening words of this editorial:

The Cuban crisis has had the effect of sharpening our national consciousness. It often takes a jolt of world-wide proportions to awaken man’s latent patriotism. Being Canadian carries with it in these troubled times, the implicit obligation of lending a calm and objective viewpoint in the long and difficult period of negotiation that lies ahead. This is clearly no time to relax vigil or lapse into a false sense of security. Every Canadian needs to retain this quickened sense of awareness of the impact of events today at home and abroad. This entails knowledge and a continued effort to understand international as well as national affairs.¹

Linking the resolution of the Cuban missile crisis with an the desire to play the role of a peaceable middle power and multilateral leader in global affairs, this editorial points to a significant trend in the Canadian experience of the crisis. We have already seen the range of Canadian opinion regarding Cuba and Cuba’s role during the missile crisis, as well as that of the United States. This third way of looking Canada’s role in the missile crisis is intricately linked to its changing national identity.

This chapter is therefore concerned with understanding not how Canadians viewed other countries during the missile crisis, but rather with how they understood

¹ “Distinctively Canadian,” Regina Leader-Post, 31 October 1962, p. 4.
themselves and their place in a global framework. In the wake of the Second World War, Canada experienced a national identity transition, in which its former status as a colony of Great Britain was decisively shed in favour of something new. This new identity was greatly influenced by Pearson’s actions during the Suez crisis, memories of significant military contributions during the First and Second World Wars, a growing middle power status and the desire to have power and influence within the Commonwealth and in dealings with the United States. Whether or not Canada did in fact play this role is not as important, in this chapter, as the growing belief that the country should have more influence, in general, but also in specific international crises like the Cuban missile crisis. One important aspect of this emerging identity is that it was not simply the concern of the political elite. It was developed with active participation from citizens. Created by politicians, the media, and Canadians themselves through newspapers, speeches, campaign promises, and culture, this identity was also consumed and reshaped by the same politicians, media and public to become a dynamic force that was never (and still is not) easily definable.

Therefore, the first goal of this chapter is to explore which understandings of identity came into play during the Cuban missile crisis. Many historians have examined this period, defined by some as postwar and others as the early Cold War period, in the context of the changing Canadian identity. As we have seen in previous chapters, Canadians did not have one single way of thinking about the missile crisis. It prompted

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2 See, for example, Buckner, Canada and the End of Empire; Daniel Francis, National Dreams: Myth, Memory and Canadian History (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997); Igartua, The Other Quiet Revolution; Palmer, Canada’s 1960s; Razack, Dark Threats and White Knights; M.F. Salat, The Canadian Novel: A Search for Identity (Delhi: B.R. Pub. House, 1993); and Robert Wright, Virtual Sovereignty: Nationalism, Culture and the Canadian Question (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 2004).
discussions of Canadian foreign policy, nuclear weapons, and relations with both Cuba and the United States. However, these public discussions were often couched in language which suggested that whether one believed Canada should accept nuclear weapons immediately, or reject them forever, the question was a matter of international honor and Canada’s ability to be a good global citizen and mediator in world affairs. Thus this chapter will explore the dimensions of this emerging identity, and how Canadians expressed and engaged with it through the written record.

However, this chapter also seeks to explore why, in public discussion, the Cuban missile crisis was linked with this identity transition in the first place. Why did such editorials as the one above engage with the idea of Canadian patriotism and unity as a long-term effect of the Cuban missile crisis? Why did so many other Canadian commentators, from the Prime Minister down to the authors of letters to newspapers, create a link between the missile crisis and Canada’s global identity? Why was this such an important discussion in this time period? This chapter argues that some Canadians understood the Cuban missile crisis as part of a larger process of identity transition. There were those who believed that the nation, as a mediator and peaceful middle power, was being put to the test. Thus, when Prime Minister Diefenbaker suggested on Monday night that a non-aligned UN inspection team be sent into Cuba to verify that Kennedy’s allegations regarding the existence of the missile sites were true, he was drawing from this repertoire of ideas about Canada’s role in the world. Following a discussion of Diefenbaker’s UN inspection team suggestion and its implications, I will discuss other suggestions for resolving the crisis that emerged. There were those who believed that Canada could play a mediating role in the crisis, and others who drew explicit
comparisons between the Suez and Cuban missile crises. All such suggestions reflected the notion that it was Canada’s duty to help resolve the crisis. In addition, the post-missile crisis argument that Canada was not properly consulted will also be (re)examined in this light. The chapter will conclude by looking at what was seen to be Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s failure to fulfill the expectations assigned him and the government during the crisis, and the resulting criticism leveled at him.

I will begin by defining the concept of identity in the context of this argument. “Identity” was used often in public discourse of the crisis but defined rarely. Benedict Anderson’s definition of nationalism is useful in understanding national identity. Anderson writes that a nation can be defined as an “imagined political community…both inherently limited and sovereign…it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”3 The nation is limited, because even within the largest nation there are boundaries, whether political or real, beyond which the nation ends and something else begins. It is also a community, since, “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”4 If we take this as the primary definition of the nation, we can build upon it the concept of national identity. What are the primary characteristics of the imagined community of Canada? What characteristics do people associate with a nation’s identity?

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4 Ibid., p. 7.
Historian José E. Igartua suggests that national identity must “voiced collectively” through public discourse. He focuses on the expression of national identity in newspapers, and suggests that in a very short time in the postwar period Canada shed its identity as a subject of the British Commonwealth. Examining issues such as the Suez crisis and the flag debate, he develops the idea that this “other” quiet revolution, a play on the concept of the similar identity transition that Québec experienced, was a significant force in Canadian society. Bryan Palmer also has a useful definition of identity:

On the one hand identity is a semantic shorthand conveying a consciousness of collectivity, a subjective understanding of attachment to the nation that is shared broadly, not quite as an essential sameness, and not necessarily with the fervor characteristic of deeply committed nationalism; on the other it is a social construction, often purposefully and forcefully ideological, conveyed through powerful agencies in order to foster and deepen belief in what is being proclaimed.

These two definitions are particularly useful, since they emphasizes the emotional and constructed nature of the concept. Identity does not form spontaneously; it is constructed from various sources and thus can be redefined.

Robert Wright suggests another way to understand Canadian identity is through using the concept of ambivalence. Unlike the terms “irony” or “paradox,” ambivalence has yet to fully enter the North American lexicon and is often misunderstood as a paralysis-like state of indifference. Rather, the actual meaning has more to do with the reconciliation of contrasting feelings, such as love and hate. He argues that contrary to their reputation of “timid-fence sitters or apathetic victims of situational forces,” Canadians “have developed remarkably sophisticated cultural and political strategies for deriving pleasure, prosperity and peace of mind out of conditions of contradiction,

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5 Igartua, The Other Quiet Revolution, p. 5.
6 Palmer, Canada’s 1960s, p. 7, original emphasis.
paradox and irony.” Canadians, therefore, are not as confused about identity as they have often been portrayed. Rather, they have a “uniquely Canadian” way of dealing with contradictory forces. He concludes that “ambivalence has allowed, and perhaps even fostered a Canadian propensity for pragmatism, flexibility and adaptability; yet, equally remarkable, it has done so for the most part without damaging Canadians’ longstanding sense of moral certitude.” This insight helps explain some of the Canadian reaction to the Cuban missile crisis. Many Canadians refused to think they were apathetic victims of situational forces represented by Khrushchev, Castro, and to a much greater extent, Kennedy. Rather, this segment of public debate understood Canada as a potential actor in the crisis.

My definition of “identity” draws from all these definitions. Identity is imagined, in the sense that there is no law or written code in which it is defined. It is dynamic, because it changes over time. What many would recognize as a Canadian identity at the time of the Cuban missile crisis would be familiar to a twenty-first century investigator, and yet there are tangible differences. The connection to, and indeed even the use of the concept of the British Empire or Commonwealth, for example, was significantly more present in 1962. Identity is also constructed, in the sense that media and other public discourse help create and change definitions of identity. Canadian identity is also ambivalent, in that it can accept and take into consideration conflicting realities. Finally, it is emotional, in the sense that Canadians in this period subscribed to it, almost in the absence of logic. Canada’s power and influence on the global stage were, Adam

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7 Wright, Virtual Sovereignty, p. 16.
8 Ibid., p. 17.
Chapnick and others have illustrated, less than Canadian society believed it was. However, Canadian commentators clung to the belief that Canada could and ought to do something to help resolve the crisis. Thus, as we will see, when Diefenbaker was not able to successfully fulfill the role imagined for Canada in the crisis, there were inevitable consequences.

**Diefenbaker’s Suggestion for a Neutral United Nations Inspection Team**

As we have seen, Diefenbaker’s reaction to Kennedy’s speech was to call for a multilateral inspection team to determine the real threat level of the missiles in Cuba. He claimed that while there had not been enough time to fully comprehend the situation, one possibility they should explore was sending a “a group of nations, perhaps the eight nations comprising the unaligned members of the 18 nation disarmament committee” to Cuba to make an “on-site inspection … to ascertain what the facts are.” He concluded that he believed “it would provide an objective answer to what is going on in Cuba.” On the surface, there was nothing surprising about his words. He drew on an already well-known tradition of Canada as a mediator and negotiator at the United Nations. Diefenbaker surely did not think there was anything wrong with this and, despite some misgivings from External Affairs, he believed that this suggestion of an inspection team could buy some time for the world before tempers flared and missiles were launched. At the very least, the inspection team would provide additional proof for Kennedy,

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9 See Chapnick, *The Middle Power Project*.  
11 See Robinson, *Diefenbaker’s World*, for an interesting discussion of where this suggestion came from as well as the diplomatic reaction it received.
should the Soviet Union use its veto in the security council to stop UN attempts to mediate the crisis. Diefenbaker thought if the Soviet Union and Cuba resisted the suggestion, it would further prove their guilt.\footnote{Diefenbaker, \emph{One Canada}, vol. III, p. 79.}

What did Canadians think of the suggestion? The initial press coverage of Diefenbaker’s speech was neutral, if not positive. Tuesday morning, the \textit{Montreal Gazette} described the atmosphere in Parliament during the speech as somber. After Diefenbaker finished, this story reported, the various party leaders united behind him and said that “in this crisis, with peace at stake, they would throw their entire weight behind Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s battered minority government so that it could speak for Parliament and the Canadian people as a whole. Each such pledge of cooperation and support was greeted with tumultuous applause.”\footnote{Arthur Blakely, “Diefenbaker Suggests Neutral Group Inspect Cuban ‘Missile Sites’,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 23 October 1962, p. 1.} Many Canadians, Diefenbaker included, believed this was Canada’s rightful role, as a defender of the United Nations and mediator.

However, reports soon made their way to Canada that the United States was displeased by Diefenbaker’s suggestion. The \textit{Regina Leader-Post}, among other sources, reported that “The Diefenbaker plan…was given a chilly reception in Washington. State department officials said the crisis was too urgent to wait for a neutral-nation inspection group to go into action.”\footnote{James Nelson, “UN may look at Diefenbaker plan,” \textit{Regina Leader-Post}, 23 October 1962, p. 1.} The \textit{Winnipeg Free Press} carried an editorial arguing that Diefenbaker’s suggestion was “more likely to becloud than clarify the issues and has already invoked resentment in the United States.”

department spokesman asked “don’t they believe us?” in response. Tension in the Canadian-American relationship, discussed in the previous chapter, was thus evident in the response to Diefenbaker’s suggestion. Journalist Charles Lynch noted that the United States was increasingly frustrated with the Diefenbaker government, and this latest suggestion only made matters worse. The suggestion, he said, “appeared to cast doubt on President Kennedy’s word that such sites existed.” A distinction needed to be made between Diefenbaker’s suggestion that a UN team be sent to Cuba to verify the existence of the sites, and Kennedy’s suggestion that a UN team be sent to Cuba to verify dismantling of the sites they already knew existed.

Asa McKercher’s analysis of the crisis notes that this speech was “poorly worded.” The resulting impression was that the Canadian government’s response was “half-hearted.” Even Diefenbaker realized right away that it was “a rather unfortunate gaffe.” McKercher observes that the Prime Minister’s “purpose was not to compete with a US resolution; rather, it was to put forward a proposal which could be used in the event that the Soviet veto [in the Security council] was used.” Nevertheless, there was significant public backlash, and Diefenbaker decided that clarification was required. As we have seen, Diefenbaker did not voice strong support for the American blockade of Cuba until Thursday, 25 October. This delay, as well as the suggestion for United Nations involvement, was perceived to be a double insult. Diefenbaker latter clarified his words. The comment was not, the Prime Minister insisted, meant to doubt whether the

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18 Ibid., p. 340.
19 Ibid., p. 340.
missiles were in Cuba, but rather to provide third-party corroboration to and strengthen the American position. This clarification, combined with his speech supporting the United States on Tuesday, was Diefenbaker’s attempt to clear his record. In one of the last speeches that Diefenbaker made on the missile crisis, he attempted to sweep aside the controversy altogether, claiming that Canada had played its rightful role in the crisis and acted decisively in the cause of peace.

Can Diefenbaker’s comment be explained as a slip of the tongue, for which he ought not to be condemned? Why even examine the suggestion, if it was merely, as Diefenbaker claimed, a miscommunication? We could easily dismiss it, except that despite Diefenbaker’s clarification, people continued to discuss it at length. Some Canadians thought his suggestion was an excellent example of Canadian statesmanship and diplomacy. Others condemned Diefenbaker’s temerity in doubting the United States, and argued that Canada’s international prestige was diminished since Canada would now be thought an unreliable ally. However, no matter which side they took, those who discussed this controversy employed similar language that was couched in terms of Canada’s duty, its international honor and its role as a global citizen.

The idea that Canada could play a significant role in international relations has been explored by various scholars. Janice Cavell has shown that the unreal expectations that many Canadians had about the amount of influence their nation actually wielded on the world stage stemmed from gendered notions of influence put forth by Pearson in the 1950s. Cavell argues that Pearson’s style revolved around acting like a “good wife” and influencing the United States through persuasion and reasoning while publicizing an image of Canada as a masculine junior partner of the alliance. Unfortunately, “his public
pronouncements seem to have inadvertently created a general, and highly unrealistic, expectation among journalists and their readers that the country would in fairly short order be promoted from junior partner to a more senior leadership role."

Keating’s argument about the Canadian preference for multilateral initiatives in the postwar period is also helpful here. He explains the historical precedents for the Canadian desire to play a role on the world stage. The response to Diefenbaker’s suggestion was a perfect example of this thinking. Some believed that Canada could play a role, through either the UN or NATO, that was intrinsically bound to their duty as Canadians.

How do we make sense of this sentiment? Consider how Canada became involved in such organizations as NATO in the first place. Robert Teigroh argues that in the postwar period, or from approximately 1945-1950, Canadians became embroiled in Cold War ways of thinking that drew them into the American “coalition of the willing.”

From issues ranging to the public’s response to the atomic bombing of Japan, to the Korean war, this period was characterized by a high level of acceptance for American Cold War initiatives. This is particularly relevant, he argues, for the manner in which both Canada and the United States became members of NATO. Formed in April 1949, NATO was accepted by the government and press with almost no public dissent. Teigroh suggests that the Canadian public’s acceptance of NATO differed to some extent from that of the American public, but acceptance was strong and hints of dissent were immediately silenced. He also notes that once Canadian membership in NATO was

21 Keating, Canada and World Order, p. 4.
22 Teigroh, Warming Up to the Cold War.
23 Ibid., pp. 127-167.
finalized, there began to be some criticism and concern about how quickly and secretly the treaty was made and signed, and the extent to which Canadian autonomy had been sacrificed.  

The growing criticism of the American cold war consensus which followed the formation of NATO and the Korean war did not signify a wish to retreat from the world stage. On the contrary, Canadians wanted to be involved in the world, but on their own terms. The belief that Canadians could have an impact on the manner in which international relations were conducted was certainly influenced by Pearson’s role in the Suez crisis. Thus the suggestion became emblematic not just of Canada’s ability to act in this crisis, but in all international events. It became wrapped up with Canada’s new but increasingly important tradition of peaceful mediation. As a result, Pearson’s importance, as a symbol of diplomatic leadership, his role in the creation of the concept of peacekeeping, and his subsequent Nobel Peace prize played a significant role in the missile crisis. Peacekeeping has since become a vital concept in Canadian cultural life, but not an uncontested one. As historian J.L. Granatstein has pointed out, the Suez crisis had a significant effect on the Canadian army, since it “started the process of making peacekeeping a major Canadian defence priority and also signaled the end of Canada’s automatic deference to British military professionalism.”

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24 Ibid., p. 167.
How, then, can we understand the manner in which some Canadians understood and reacted to Diefenbaker’s suggestion? There were many who supported Diefenbaker’s suggestion to send a UN inspection team to Cuba. They believed that Diefenbaker was being true to the Canadian tradition of diplomacy and statesmanship. For example, the Women’s Committee of the New Democratic Party congratulated Diefenbaker for his excellent suggestion, as did the Manitoba branch of the Voice of Women. The latter even sent a copy of their telegram into the *Winnipeg Free Press*, which said they were “heartened” by his attitude on the matter.27 Another member of the Voice of Women from Vancouver wrote a letter to Diefenbaker commending his courage in making the suggestion. Mary E. Allan believed his suggestion was wise, and that in this “lamentable crisis…I am sure your Government will have all thinking people united behind you.” The same writer also commended Diefenbaker for his and Howard Green’s efforts towards disarmament.28 There was discussion of the speech in various newspapers across the country as well. The *Globe and Mail* ran an editorial which warmly praised Diefenbaker’s efforts: “Prime Minister John Diefenbaker deserves the fullest credit for his statesmanlike attitude when he spoke in the Commons immediately after the President’s broadcast. He was quick off the mark with the only constructive suggestion to emerge in the hour of crisis.”29 The editorial also noted that the suggestion might have had a greater effect had it been put before the Security Council before the

United States blockade took effect. However, there was not enough time for Diefenbaker to do so, since he had been informed only hours before Kennedy announced his plan.

Another commentator, Arthur Blakely, argued that Diefenbaker’s healthy skepticism indicated that Canada was becoming an independent nation. Linking this independent national self-awareness explicitly to Canada’s reaction to the Suez crisis, Blakely noted that “nowhere was there to be found any relic of the ‘ready, aye, ready’ position which has once been a feature of Canadian readiness to rally to a war cause.”

Diefenbaker also received support in a letter to the editor of the Toronto Daily Star. This individual was concerned with the seemingly unstoppable spread of nuclear weapons, and believed Diefenbaker’s UN suggestion had merit. The writer suggested that Canada exert pressure on the United States to withdraw its “provocative and dangerous blockade.”

These individuals who supported Diefenbaker’s idea did so because they believed that forming a UN inspection team to go into Cuba and help calm some of the international tension was a good role for Canada to play during the crisis. They believed that the Prime Minister was exhibiting Canadian characteristics of mediation, using multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, and attempting to bring about peace through discussion and diplomacy rather than blockade and war.

Not all Canadians, however, believed this was the case. Many criticized the Prime Minister’s idea for being impractical, since the time had long since passed for UN inspection teams. It was now time to support the United States as an ally. However, even those who criticized Diefenbaker’s idea used the exact same language of duty and peace. They argued that the only way to fulfill their international duty and keep the

peace was through a strong and united front against Russian and Cuban threats. The nation’s international prestige would be fulfilled not by sending in a group of inspectors to confirm what they knew was true, but rather by supporting their allies. One commentator in the Globe and Mail accused Diefenbaker of having “jumped the gun” with his suggestion.32 Another commentator from the Edmonton Journal suggested that Diefenbaker was foolish to doubt the proof that the American authorities had shown the world. Citing statistic after statistic, this editorial concluded by asking “what legitimate reason can a tiny nation like Cuba give for acquiring weapons that can deliver an explosion of up to 5,000,000 tons of TNT on a target 2,400 miles away?”33 The answer implied there was no reason other than to wipe out the United States. Thus Kennedy was justified in his actions, and Canada ought to support them.

Others were less critical and found some value in Diefenbaker’s suggestion, even though they believed that the overall idea was flawed. An editorial in the Toronto Daily Star found the Prime Minister’s suggestion “well-meaning but, in our view, it has little merit.” This writer argued that “it appears to offer nothing that would reduce the incendiary crisis while at the same time it has undoubtedly offended official Washington.” The author then posited that offending official Washington by itself was of little consequence if the suggestion itself was useful. However, Castro was unlikely to allow a team of inspectors into the country, and the situation was already far too urgent for such an initiative. The question was no longer how to prevent missiles from getting into Cuba, but how to get them out without starting a nuclear war. Diefenbaker’s

suggestion, while good in principle, was too little, too late.34 Another opinion piece in the same newspaper wondered whether or not Diefenbaker had fully thought through the idea before suggesting it in the House of Commons, and took his clarification on Tuesday to mean that he had indeed been speaking without due consideration. This article was concerned with how Washington would view the half-formed idea and compared Diefenbaker unfavorably with Pearson’s efforts in 1956. Diefenbaker was depicted as a diplomatic novice, while Pearson gave “the feeling of an experienced hand.”35

One final newspaper editorial encapsulates all the arguments of those who criticized Diefenbaker. The Winnipeg Free Press, a newspaper which tended to be rather critical of Diefenbaker, accused the government of not doing enough to help the American cause. Canada’s only two attempts to do anything in this crisis were Diefenbaker’s suggestion to send a UN inspection team to Cuba and to cancel Soviet landing privileges in Newfoundland. Unfortunately, “neither of these gestures has much practical value.” The Soviet Union had not used the landing sites in Newfoundland for some time, and the “proposed neutral disarmament team would be a poor substitute for the UN observer corps requested in the American resolution.” This piece concluded with some damming words for Diefenbaker’s government:

What is needed (and what has not thus far been forthcoming at Ottawa) is an outright declaration of wholehearted support for President Kennedy’s stand. What is at stake is not simply a small island in the Caribbean but the whole principle of collective security and nothing less than such a declaration will fulfill this country’s obligations to its hemispheric allies and neighbors.36

Whether one believed that the proper course of action was to support the hemispheric alliance or to pause and reconsider Kennedy’s actions, many Canadians employed the concept of their international duty as the guiding principle. Thus we can see that Diefenbaker’s suggestion for a UN inspection team had, for some, a tremendous significance.

**Canada the Mediator?**

Related to the suggestion to send in a United Nations inspection team was the idea, suggested by some during the crisis, that Diefenbaker could act as a mediator between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, Canada had little influence with either country in this matter. Given the history of personal dislike between Kennedy and Diefenbaker, as well as Diefenbaker’s hesitation in supporting the American blockade from the start, Canada’s influence over the American decision-making process was limited. In addition, Canada’s position in the western bloc made any influence over the Soviet Union unlikely. Therefore Canada’s role, politically, was one of an observer. So why did so many Canadians insist that Diefenbaker could play a role in mediating the crisis? This section suggests that Canada’s memory of its experience as an influential actor in the Suez crisis, its role as a peaceable middle power in the postwar period, and its role within NATO and NORAD had the effect of making some Canadians believe that their nation’s role was more significant than it actually was. Examining these facets of the Canada-as-mediator theme within public discourse during the missile crisis helps us understand the importance many Canadians ascribed to their nation’s role during the crisis.
One letter written to the Prime Minister’s office from a Professor of Geology at St. Mary’s University in Halifax made the connection between Suez and Cuba explicitly. David Hope-Simpson begged for caution and consultation with the United Nations. He sympathized with the United States, arguing that “Castro has put them in a situation which exposes them to unbearable insecurity and current U.N. procedures gave them no way of removing this danger, so that they felt driven to unilateral action.” However, he insisted that the United Nations must not be undermined. He summarized the Suez crisis as follows:

This conflict of loyalty in some respects parallels the conflict of loyalties that so divided the West at the time of the Suez crisis in 1956…To summarize, the sequence of events was as follows: - great provocation by a small power; in the absence of conflict resolution, desperate unilateral action by major powers; mobilization of world opinion despite great conflicts of loyalties in the West; prompt U.N. intervention, reluctantly accepted by both sides; in due course negotiation and restoration of normal diplomatic relations.37

Despite significant debate and even dissent during the Suez crisis, the government felt it necessary to oppose the British role in the affair. He concluded that the successful resolution of the Suez crisis justified Canada’s opposition to a major power. The Cuban missile crisis was another situation in which Canada could play an independent role. “If there is force to this argument,” he concluded, “Canada’s role must be to mobilize the force of world opinion in favour of U.N. action.”38

Another commentator who made the comparison between the Suez crisis and the Cuban missile crisis saw similarities in both international and domestic terms. An article in the Regina Leader-Post noted that in 1956, when Britain and France invaded Egypt,

38 Ibid.
Prime Minister St. Laurent condemned large superpower nations’ disregard for the sovereignty of small nations. The journalist reported that at the time, Green and Diefenbaker both criticized the Liberal government, claiming that, “it is high time Canada had a government which will not knife Canada’s best friends in the back.” It looked, early in the week of the missile crisis, like the same pattern would repeat itself, only with reversed roles. A large superpower and ally of Canada’s exhibited aggression against a small power. Only this time, Diefenbaker was stabbing the ally in the back. This editorial noted the irony in his turnabout.

Two more examples of the comparison made between the Cuban missile crisis and the Suez crisis illustrate that many regarded Lester B. Pearson as an international diplomat, and called on him in this new crisis to exhibit leadership. This is particularly revealing in light of revisionist scholarship which has shown the progressive Pearson tradition to be largely mythical. Pearson is often regarded as a Canadian hero who created the concept of peacekeeping, sought an independent voice for Canadian foreign policy, and contributed ideas to economic development. A collection of essays from a conference in 1997, edited by Greg Donaghy, led the way in reassessing the motivations of the actions of Canadian diplomats such as Pearson, and understand his actions as realistic and pragmatic, rather than the idealistic portrayal that has been traditionally put forth. Following in this revisionist trend, political scientist Mark Neufeld has recently argued that Pearson was, at heart, a Cold Warrior, and many of his policies as Prime Minister contradict his legend. Debunking the liberal-progressive myth helps to explain

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40 Ibid.
why Pearson ultimately accepted nuclear weapons on Canadian soil.\textsuperscript{42} Neufeld attempts to understand how both proponents for and those in opposition to the current war in Afghanistan utilize Pearson’s memory and legacy. Ultimately he concludes that “rejecting the Pearsonian legacy may be a more productive use of energies than attempts to harness to progressive causes what is, in reality, a highly contradictory tradition at best.”\textsuperscript{43}

In 1962, the idea of Canada as a peaceable middle power that could help mediate the crisis was in place, even if the notion of Canada as a peacekeeping nation was in its infancy. In a letter to the editor of the \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, Mrs. John C. MacDonald praised the newspaper for an editorial which denounced the American blockade of Cuba. She said the editorial was a “welcome glimmer of sanity” and that “it is a shock to see how our political leaders have flocked around the banner of ‘our allies, our friends, right or wrong.’” She continued,

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this 19\textsuperscript{th} century moral slogan jars in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century when there is beginning to appear some realization of a higher loyalty to the world community and its charter. This higher loyalty was recognized both by Mr. Pearson for Canada, and the United States, during the Suez crisis and led both countries to defend the UN charter, rather than support their allies, Britain and France. This stand enhanced the prestige of both the United States and Canada. \textit{Canada’s stature in the world community was never greater than at that moment when Mr. Pearson took an independent stand in favor of international law and proposed UNEF – an imaginative and constructive solution to the problem.}\textsuperscript{44}
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She remembered Pearson’s actions during the Suez crisis in a positive manner and wished Canadian government officials would again put world peace before loyalty to

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\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., p. 135.
\textsuperscript{44} Letter to the editor, signed Mrs. John C. McDonald, Carp, Ontario, \textit{Ottawa Citizen}, 30 October 1962, p. 6, emphasis added.
\end{flushright}
allies. Another Canadian, in a telegram to the Prime Minister’s office, called for the
government to take whatever measures were necessary to obtain the full truth about what
was happening in Cuba. If some “breathing space” could be found, this individual
believed that “Canada can yet help lead the way to a reapprochement [sic]…Petty politics
must be abandoned with urgent speed, the need of the hour calls for an international
peacemaker of the stature of Canadian Nobel Prizewinner, Lester B. Pearson, a man of
respected and proven capabilities who possesses full knowledge of the United Nations.”
These two examples illustrate that some believed Canada could have an influence over
the crisis, if only Pearson’s expertise was utilized.

Therefore, whether Diefenbaker and the Canadian government were able to have
an influence over events was less significant to Canadians than the fact that many
believed that the Canadian government ought to have a role in the successful resolution
of the crisis. Some Canadians also voiced their belief that Canada could play an
influential role in the crisis in a more general way. As a middle power and as an active
and respected member of the United Nations, they believed Canada could exert influence
over the United States and help successfully resolve the crisis. The key to international
influence was through the United Nations. Why have Canadians been so fond of the role
they have had in the United Nations, as well as the relative importance of that
organization in world events? The answer lies in the identity transition which was in
process during the crisis. It is possibly a coincidence that one Canadian newspaper felt
the need to lay out the history of the United Nations and Canada’s role within that

1962. Letter from S. Kaplan, editor of Jewish Western Bulletin, copy of an article to appear in newsletter,
organization in the midst of the missile crisis, but if so, it was certainly a timely one. The Regina Leader-Post published a story called “Canada and UN” in its 23 October 1962 issue discussing the roles of various Canadian Ministers of External Affairs from St. Laurent to Green. The article concluded that Pearson had done the most “to establish Canada as an active and co-operative member.” It even went so far as to state that Pearson “became, in many people’s eyes, the image of Canada.”

Therefore it is no surprise that some Canadians asked the Prime Minister use his influence at the United Nations to help negotiate a peace. Obviously concerned about the consequences of nuclear war, Mrs. Gwen Whittaker wrote that “a nuclear war over Cuba, or any other issue, is unthinkable, especially for Canada, lying as she does between the two nuclear powers.” She urged the Prime Minister to “see to it that Canada uses all her influence, at the United Nations and elsewhere, to prevent such a monstrous war from taking place.” This letter was dated a full month before Kennedy’s announcement regarding missiles in Cuba. Clearly this individual could see where the tension between Cuba and the United States was taking the world, and wished to stop it from happening.

These pleas continued during and after the missile crisis. David Hope-Simpson wrote again to the Prime Minister to make the case for Canadian involvement in world affairs through the United Nations. “Canada,” he wrote, “has a right and profound duty to make a persuasive case in the councils of its alliances for a non-nuclear policy of support for U Thant and the UN for itself and its non-nuclear allies.” He felt compelled to write since he strongly believed that, as a member of the human race, his first

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allegiance belonged to the United Nations and he felt “bound to resist the subversion of that organization by the big powers, eastern or western.” A letter to the editor of the Saskatoon-Star Phoenix presented a similar case. This individual argued that Kennedy’s belief that American survival necessitated his actions was invalid, since the entire world had been endangered since the invention of the hydrogen bomb. Thus missiles in Cuban possession added no extra danger and “to argue that Cuba would initiate nuclear war is to abandon logic.” The letter concluded by asking, “why then, can our protests serve ‘no useful purpose at all’? Why should we sit silent while reckless militarists bypass the UN? Surely Canadians have more responsibility to mankind than to the U.S.”

Responsibility to humankind and to the United Nations as the only organization which can defend the greater good was key. Local alliances and Cold War politics had to take second place.

Two political cartoons which appeared in the Vancouver Sun and the Toronto Daily Star, expressed this concept well. The first (see figure 5.1) appeared during the crisis. It depicted two Canadian soldiers in front of a stone wall with a doorway. The viewer can make out the words Canadian Army over the doorway. In front of the wall are a few cannons, indicating a fighting force; however, rather than holding cannonballs and preparing to defend the country, the cannons are being used as flower pots. The soldiers are holding watering cans, and the Canadian officer in the image is telling the two soldiers, “You will be advised in Orders of any Alert…meantime regular watering at

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49 Letter to the editor, signed Anti-tocsin, Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 2 November 1962, p. 14.
0800 hours as usual.”\textsuperscript{50} The most obvious meaning is that Diefenbaker’s lack of action regarding raising the level of alert rendered the military useless; feminizing it by reducing its role to that of a flower-tender. Another implication of this cartoon is more insidious: the Canadian military was harmless to begin with. This is not a fighting force that is feared the world over; the flowers growing from the guns suggest a peaceful status. In the background of this cartoon, there is a birdhouse and socks hanging to dry on a line strung between two turrets. This is not an army that has seen much action lately.

The other political cartoon depicts a man and woman sitting on a couch in front of a television watching, presumably, the news (see figure 5.2). This cartoon appeared nearly a month after the missile crisis, but it is nevertheless indicative of the public mood in this period. The man and woman are watching the news, which features a stony faced Diefenbaker saying “no comment” in response to a reporter’s comments. Trailing from the man’s hands is a newspaper full of captions such as “situation fluid says Prime Minister.” The caption of the image is “so, we’re a dull nation…I’ll admit it…but did you ever think that our dullness may be shining like a welcome beacon in a crisis-torn world?”\textsuperscript{51} Again there is more than one meaning to this cartoon. On one level, it is commenting on the lack of political leadership in Canada. It reflected growing criticism of Diefenbaker’s indecisiveness after the missile crisis. In addition, this cartoon suggests that dullness was an admirable trait. It subscribed to the notion of Canada as a peaceful example for the rest of the world.

\textsuperscript{50} “You will be advised in Orders of any Alert…meantime regular watering at 0800 hours as usual,” political cartoon, \textit{Vancouver Sun}, 24 October 1962, p. C, final edition.
\textsuperscript{51} “So, we’re a dull nation…” political cartoon, \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, 29 November 1962, p. 6.
One final example of the sentiment that Canada could be a mediator during the Cuban missile crisis comes from Mrs. Ethel Sorenson. She wrote to the Prime Minister during the crisis, and again a few months later. She was in Canada during the missile crisis, but subsequently moved to Havana.\textsuperscript{52} She wrote of the positive manner in which Canada was viewed in Havana. She also expressed her opinion about Canada’s role during and after the crisis. It is worth quoting at length:

It is with the greatest admiration that I write now thrilled with the recent display of your wisdom and statesmanship. Canadians are proud of you for refusing to obey United States ‘orders’ concerning nuclear arms. Canada has a good name abroad. Your firm action will only enhance that good name. It will in addition bring courage to the leadership of countries not so vast as ours to resist American pressure toward war. Living here in Cuba one is only too aware of the role Americans have played against the cause of peace. Although it is written right into their own constitution ‘no nation shall have the right to interfere in the internal affairs of any other nation,’ the U.S. has on numerous occasions interfered (and with violence) in the affairs of Latin America. Now Canada, spread though it is from sea to sea is expected to accept their domination. Hurrah for Mr. Diefenbaker and Canadians independence. Let Canada’s be a peaceful contribution to world affairs. Let us live and let live.\textsuperscript{53}

Many Canadians would have agreed heartily with these sentiments. They believed that Canada’s role in world affairs was one of a middle power committed to the United Nations and to the cause of peace, not to hemispheric alliances or paths that could have taken the world down the road to nuclear destruction.

Among those who believed Canada’s role in the missile crisis should be one of a mediator and peace-maker, there was disagreement about the means by which the country should achieve this aim. There was a segment of the Canadian public that believed the

\textsuperscript{52} This information is gathered from her letter to the Prime Minister. Otherwise, there is no other information about who she was.

way to a peaceful and successful resolution of the missile crisis was through accepting nuclear weapons, playing a full role in NATO and NORAD, clarifying defence policy and placing the military on full alert. The end goal was still to avoid nuclear war, but this argument advocated a very different means of achieving that peace. The debate on whether or not Canada should accept nuclear weapons, discussed in chapter four, continued in the wake of the missile crisis. The crisis was the closest the world had come to actual nuclear war, and yet Diefenbaker had still not allowed the military to equip the nuclear warheads. The nuclear weapons issue came to a crisis point by February 1963, and ultimately was one of the key issues over which the Diefenbaker government fell. Some commentators believed that in order to fulfill the nation’s true potential as a mediator, it had to equip its weapons systems with the nuclear warheads with which they were intended to work. Otherwise Canada was not fulfilling its contractual obligations in NATO and NORAD and would not have a voice within these organizations. If Canada had no voice, then it could have no influence.

The nuclear weapons aspect of this argument was articulated by an editorial in the *Edmonton Journal*. The title of the piece “Restore Canada’s Honor” was extremely telling. Discussing Canada’s air division in Europe and a recent report on its status made by John Warren, the editorial claimed that “Canada is failing NATO as well as North American air defence.” Blaming the federal government for its inability to accept nuclear weapons, the editorial insisted that “the government need not avoid nuclear weapons like the plague just because it is anxious to promote a nuclear test-ban and disarmament. There is nothing incompatible about the two.” The editorial argued they were linked, and Canada’s efforts to avoid having nuclear weapons on its soil hampered these efforts.
Resistance would not make a difference in terms of Canada’s non-existent influence in Moscow, and was diminishing Canada’s voice in Washington and London. The article concludes with these words: “If Prime Minister Diefenbaker’s government is really anxious to promote a test-ban and disarmament, it had better honor Canada’s defence commitments without delay.” Diefenbaker’s stubborn resistance was thus baffling. A letter to the editor of the *Halifax Chronicle-Herald* concurred, directly linking Canada’s lack of nuclear weapons to the recent Cuban crisis as well as to future potential conflicts between China and India. This letter puts it bluntly:

> If Canada is to hold herself as a nation that helps to keep world peace, then she must quit pussyfooting around and accept nuclear arms, and stand with her allies in this endeavor...we, the Canadian people have never shrunk from our duty and this is part of it. Arm us so that we can hold our heads up with the rest of our allies and not look like the fence sitters you make us out to be.”

These two opinions are representative of the larger argument for Canada’s accepting nuclear weapons. The decision could only enhance Canada’s international prestige and the cause of long-term peace.

Other commentators made similar arguments about Canada’s alliances, claiming that the Cuban missile crisis demonstrated a vacuum in the nation’s defence policy. Canada, an editorial in the *Edmonton Journal* claimed, was caught “with its armor down.” Failing to live up to the spirit, if not the exact letter, of its defence agreements, Canadians should be shocked that they were not pulling their weight in the serious matter of Western defence, and that Canadians “are bound to be dismayed by the realization that their national government is welching on defence and damaging the good name of the

country and its fighting men.” A similar sentiment was voiced in a letter written by Robert D. Auger, from Québec City. He also argued that Canada was shirking its duty to the world by not fully committing itself to the western alliance. “Canada’s stand on different matters which involved the peace of the world, has always been one of a firm consideration towards keeping peace to our human brothers and to us Canadians…The latest development of the Cuban crisis seems to show that Canada is afraid to commit itself.”

One final letter written to the prime minister in the wake of the missile crisis sums up these arguments extremely well. Victor Suthreau, writing from Bishop’s University in Lennoxville, Québec, expressed his “deep disappointment in our own role in the entire affair.” Canada seemed to be unable to clearly state its role and intentions during the missile crisis, he wrote, and he believed the country was in desperate need of strong leadership. “Canada is a strong nation in its own way, sir, and can rise to challenges if need be. But there must be inspiration; there must be forthright decisions, and most of all, there must be leadership in a hearty sense of the word.” This public commentary on Canada’s role in the crisis shows a vastly different argument about the manner in which Canadians believe that their government should have performed. This group of Canadians argued that Diefenbaker’s inability to make a decision had weakened Canada’s international reputation.

Notification or Consultation?

In the previous chapter, I argued that Diefenbaker was insulted by the manner in which he was notified, rather than consulted, regarding the crisis in Cuba. This chapter will now return to this theme, since it was an important issue for Canadians not only in the context of Canadian-American relations, but also in terms of what it meant for Canada’s role in the western alliance system. Diefenbaker, and many Canadians who agreed with him, believed that if Canada were to properly fulfill its hemispheric obligations as an ally of the United States, it needed to be consulted about actions which might lead the world into nuclear war. In his decision-making process regarding the missiles in Cuba, Kennedy did not consult the other allies. Rather, he notified them of the American decision and cited several reasons as to why they were not consulted. This section will examine Diefenbaker’s argument regarding Kennedy’s lack of consultation, as well as the Canadian public reaction, as it related to Canada’s international duty.

In a speech made on 5 November, Diefenbaker laid out what he saw as the most frustrating aspect of the missile crisis. “As I look back on the Cuban crisis,” he said, “I believe it emphasized more than ever before the necessity of there being full consultation before any action taken or policies executed that might lead to war.” He linked the cause of freedom with consultation between allies:

In the light of this recent experience, it should be made clear that consultation is a prerequisite to joint and contemporaneous action being taken, for it could never have been intended that either of the nations would automatically follow whatever stand the other might take. Consultation between nations is surely a necessary essential in the peaceful settlement of all disputes – consultation between those on both sides of any dispute. How much more essential that there be consultation between those joined on the side of freedom?

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He stressed the role the United Nations must play in the successful resolution of international crises and the potential outcomes of this crisis, which included steps towards disarmament and a test-ban treaty.

Diefenbaker was not the only Canadian who picked up on this. The issue was not simply a question of American desire for rapid action to defend the west from Soviet incursions. If its own neighbor, continental defence ally, and significant trade partner refused to consult with Canada over this, the most serious of issues, would the United States ever take Canada seriously? There were those who attempted to explain Kennedy’s decisions from the American perspective. In a wire story from Washington, Tim Creery reported President Kennedy’s explanation of why he chose to simply inform rather than consult, as well as why he decided on unilateral action. Washington felt there was not enough time to go through the full consultation process. Furthermore the consequences would be dire should the American public become aware of the missile buildup on Cuba without some sort of accompanying policy statement. They believed that “countries all over the world would have lost confidence in the U.S. firmness and sense of purpose, if it had dithered about seeking a solution while the buildup continue under its nose.”

The Canadian response to this explanation was varied. Some agreed with the Prime Minister that simply informing allies of their decision to implement such an aggressive tactic as a blockade was a flagrant violation of NATO protocol. It was also a violation of simple courtesy. Some commentators were aware of the meeting between

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Livingston Merchant and Prime Minister Diefenbaker the afternoon before Kennedy’s announcement and others were not. However, the frustration with American arrogance and bullying was intense. The *Edmonton Journal*, for instance, agreed that Canada had some cause for complaint. The *Edmonton Journal* was often pro-American and pro-nuclear weapons during the crisis and in its aftermath, which makes their condemnation of American actions all the more surprising. In a piece entitled “Cause of Complaint” the editor argued that “if the United States has a bone to pick with Canada in regard to Ottawa’s reaction to the Cuban emergency, it is equally true that Canada has reason to complain of the failure of Washington to notify and consult Ottawa in advance of President Kennedy’s announcement.”

Similarly, Bruce Phillips, writing in the *Ottawa Citizen*, advanced the argument that regardless of American excuses, Article IV of the NORAD agreement expressly laid out the principle that consultation between allies when war could result was absolutely necessary. He pointed out that the Americans might be displeased with the manner in which the Canadians acted in the crisis, but that the feeling was mutual, and that both sides would be anxious to re-examine the basis of the continental defence scheme, “in light of American failure to consult before taking a decision as potentially convulsive as the blockade.”

The issue at the core of the controversy was not merely semantic. It was significant from the perspective of the Canadian sense of independence. As he put it, the issue is whether Canada will follow blindly where the Americans lead – even if it leads us to war – or whether we march together as partners with equal knowledge of the course we are taking. President Kennedy’s decision to blockade Cuba presented the Canadian government with awesome alternatives…Although Mr. Diefenbaker and his colleagues have been criticized for his alleged failure to

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Thus there was disappointment on either side, but the fact that the United States made its decision alone and expected its allies to fall into line was problematic. An editorial in the same newspaper made a similar point. This piece argued that Canada should have supported the United States action, but nevertheless reminded readers that “the Americans are leading an alliance, not an empire. We are their comrades in the struggle, not their servants. It follows that we expect to play a part in the decision-making process at the top level of Cold War strategy.”

If it had taken President Kennedy nearly a week to make his decision after learning about the missiles, “it was hardly to be expected that all of his allies could put themselves through the same mental and organization processes in a few hours.”

The *Toronto Daily Star* also tried to explain why Canadians were hesitating in supporting the American decision. In response to former President Truman’s criticism of Diefenbaker’s lack of support, one editorial queried: “we wonder if it has occurred to Mr. Truman, or to the other American critics, that one cause for this lack of enthusiasm may be that Canada was not consulted before President Kennedy announced his intention of blockading Cuba…our government’s opinion was not asked, nor was it even given advance information. This is not the way to obtain the willing co-operation of allies.”

For Canadians, this was not just about the alliance. It was about Canada’s sovereignty,

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63 Ibid.  
64 “A lesson from the crisis,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 November 1962, p. 6  
65 Ibid.  
especially given the danger involved. The high stakes made consultation more, not less, important:

we are troubled, too, by the sudden awareness that all Canadians – and hundreds of millions of other men, women, and children around the world – were helpless pawns in the great gamble undertaken by Washington. Do we have no right to be consulted before being asked to support a decision on which the fate of every Canadian depends? Is our role to be simply that of sheep to be led unprotesting to the edge of disaster?67

The answer to these questions for many Canadians was a vehement no.

Letters to the editors of various newspapers echoed these sentiments. The lack of consultation was linked with Canadian dignity. Mrs. Mary Birchard wrote into the Toronto Daily Star to point out that “after what we and the whole world have gone through in the last week of terror, surely Canadians, if only for reasons of self-respect, will never again allow an all-powerful allied nation to notify, rather than consult with, its allies in the United Nations before embarking on action that could mean death to countless millions.”68 Another Canadian agreed with these sentiments, stating that if Canada was actually an ally of the United States, then it should be treated as such. This individual gloomily concluded that “people just don’t seem to realize it is their lives and the lives of their dear ones with which these world leaders are so irresponsibly dealing.”69

It was a matter of life and death, and Canada had a right to be consulted.

Others were more neutral on the matter. For example, an article written by Robert W. Reford in the Halifax Chronicle-Herald argued that, while it was wrong that Canada was not consulted, Kennedy had good reason for his actions. The plan needed secrecy in order to work and the significance of Kennedy appearing on television to call

68 Letter to the editor, signed Mrs. Mary Birchard, Toronto Daily Star, 30 October 1962, p. 6.
Khrushchev’s bluff would have been lost had it been widely known that he intended to do so. Furthermore, consultation with every ally would have compromised security. Ultimately, though not ideal, the situation played out as it had to. The *Montreal Gazette* agreed with this sentiment, and claimed the United States perhaps should have consulted its allies better, but as a superpower it had the right to act quickly and decisively. This editorial argued “once Mr. Kennedy decided it was his duty to get the Soviet missiles removed from Cuba, it also became his duty not to let his hands be tied. And it seems inescapable that if he had consulted each member of NATO, his hands would have been tied.” NATO’s organizational structure perhaps needed to be reorganized to give the United States, as the “backbone of the free world” more leeway in making unilateral decisions. “All the free world, whether in NATO or not, depends in the last resort upon American protection. This gives the United States a special responsibility, and makes her a special case. Within reasonable limits, the right to a considerable freedom of action must be granted her.”

There were also those who believed Canada ought not to complain and that Diefenbaker was wrong to demand consultation. This view was most clearly expressed in an editorial in the *Calgary Herald* which claimed this was a prime example of “Canada demanding to be treated as an equal partner in North American defence while refusing to fulfil [sic] the obligations inherent in such an alliance…It merely indicated that the Canadian government believes it can continue paying lip service to this partnership and

72 Ibid.
let the United States bear the full burden of defending the continent.” Calling Canada the “weak sister of the alliance” this editorial said the United States would be fully justified should they choose to simply ignore Canadian complaining. It concluded that this should be a wake-up call for Canada to fulfill its continental defence responsibilities.

Whether Canadians agreed or disagreed with Prime Minister Diefenbaker that Canada should have been consulted in the Cuban missile crisis, the debate over the issue was lively. This was not a matter of how the United States acted towards Canada only during the missile crisis. Rather, it was a vital question of whether or not the United States fundamentally recognized Canada as a partner. Many were incensed that the Americans did not seem to recognize this distinction. Some disagreed and believed that the United States was merely doing its job as the regional superpower, and Canada was impeding the successful execution of that job with its silly, nationalist calls for recognition. Yet many believed that Canada should have been consulted, especially in this instance, which could have resulted in a global war.

**Conclusion**

Some Canadians wanted their country to play a role through the United Nations or as a mediator between the superpowers in easing the tension of the crisis. Failing that, they could at least represent middle or smaller nations in leading the demand for peace and the reduction of Cold War tensions. This was part of a larger process of identity formation that began in the postwar period and continued into the sixties. This chapter has examined why and how the Cuban missile crisis became wrapped up in this question

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of identity. I have argued that some Canadians believed that they and their country could
play a role, and thus the ideas of duty, peace, and mediation were prominent in public
discussion. Therefore, whether Canadians supported the American blockade for moral
support of a major ally, or supported Cuba as a smaller power that was being unfairly
dealt with by a superpower, the two extremes (and every gradation between them) were
united in the belief that either way, the real crisis was what the country should do and
how it would be viewed by the rest of the world.
Chapter Six – Do the Textbooks Need to be Rewritten? Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis in Canada

As she sat in the kitchen of her daughter’s lakeside cabin, nearly fifty years after the Cuban missile crisis, Anita most clearly remembered her fear. A young mother during the crisis, she was concerned that her children might have to live without her. She realized that a direct hit over northern Saskatchewan was unlikely, but the DEW line was uncomfortably close and the possibility of a renegade bomb dropping nearby and wiping them all out was, for her, tangible. As she put it, “you just think you’re in this tiny world of a little town in Saskatchewan, and it’s very very important to yourself and your family…but to have this come out, it does affect you, it does, because it could be the end of the world.”¹ As we have seen, Anita was not alone in her fear. The stakes were high and the consequences could have been catastrophic.

This chapter examines how the Cuban missile crisis has been constructed in Canada’s collective memory. What is the narrative of this history in Canada? Why? What themes are included and which are left out? When the Cuban missile crisis is discussed in Canada, it is most often in the context of another argument. For example, Canadians often remember the crisis as an example of tensions between Ottawa and Washington or between Diefenbaker and Kennedy. The missile crisis is also discussed in context of Canadian-Cuban relations. It is frequently mentioned as part of Diefenbaker’s refusal to toe the American foreign policy line and discontinue relations with Cuba. In the national collective memory, the Cuban missile crisis rarely stands alone.

¹ Anita, interviewed by the author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
Canadian popular memory of the crisis can be separated into themes. These themes center around the leadership of three men: Kennedy, Castro and Diefenbaker. Using the three political leaders as an organizational framework demonstrates the various interpretations of Canada’s role in the crisis, and the diversity of the manner in which the crisis has been remembered. Some recall Kennedy’s bravery, particularly after his assassination. In general, Canadians remember Kennedy’s leadership during the crisis in a relatively positive manner. By contrast, memories of Castro and Diefenbaker are far more conflicted. There were those who idealized and believed the romanticized version of Castro and the Cuban revolution, whereas others insisted that he was a dictator and made egregious mistakes. In Diefenbaker’s case, discussions of his leadership are impassioned and characterized by strong language. There is something in our memory of Diefenbaker that sparks controversy and debate, remarkable for a Prime Minister who is often dismissed as indecisive and unremarkable. I will organize my discussion of the memories of the missile crisis around these three figures. In a dissertation which attempts to tell the history of foreign policy beyond the traditional perspective of politics and “great men,” centering the discussion around three political leaders may seem incongruous. Though the leaders themselves thus take center stage in this story, this chapter is still a history of masculinity, national identity, empire, colonialism, and memory. The final theme discussed in this chapter unites the diversity of the first three, and that theme is fear. This fear serves as a reminder of the human, everyday aspect of the Cuban missile crisis.
Historical Consciousness and Collective Memory

The connection between memory and the study of the past is complicated. Involved are questions of accuracy, the difference between individual and collective memory, and the connection of memory to myth and national identity. How is national identity constructed? Certainly, part of this process stems from a shared historical memory of the constituents of the nation. National identity and historical consciousness, therefore, are concerned with understanding the relationship of the past to the present. As Ruth Sandwell has shown, there is a great deal of the present in the study of the past.² “For the past few years” she argues, “adults and children throughout Canadian society seem to be seeking answers to deeper questions of identity, meaning, community, and nation in their study of the past.”³ American historian Michael Kammen argues that we only started connecting national identity to collective memory in the 1980s. Like Sandwell, he finds that the study of the past is determined by political concerns which almost inevitably characterize interest in what becomes a popular or predominant tradition or narrative.⁴ Therefore, in studying which aspects of the Cuban missile crisis come to the fore of public discussion at any given historical moment, it is important to understand the present in which they are being discussed.

The process by which something that happened in the past becomes “history,” and by which a historical event in a nation becomes “national history,” is a question of historical consciousness. Peter Sexias writes “our common, collective, or public,

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³ Ibid.
memory is built and maintained through a range of structures, symbols and practices: statues, commemorations, place names, symbols, films.” Defined as “the intersection among public memory, citizenship, and history education,” historical consciousness can be identified through a series of questions. How did things get to be as they are today? What is my identity? To what group do I belong? How do we judge past actions? What stories should we tell? Are things getting better or worse, and how can we make things better? Through exploring these questions, Sexias argues that we can begin to define our historical consciousness.

In a nation such as Canada, it is impossible to claim that there is one founding story, since there are too many origins, too many heroes, too many stories. We cannot escape the knowledge that there are different, but legitimate, ways to put them together, that convey very different messages about who we are, where we have been, and where we might be headed. Choosing only one to believe and convey would be a deliberate blinding.

What is collective memory, and how does this concept aid in the formation of a historical consciousness? Maurice Halbwachs’ work On Collective Memory is useful in answering this question. A sociologist influenced by Durkheim and later Annales scholars Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, Halbwachs wrote a great deal on various subjects, but his work on collective memory was most influential. He wrote of two different types of memory, autobiographical and collective. Autobiographical memory is direct, and fades over time if not reinforced by contact with people with whom the memory is shared, while collective memory does not stem from direct personal experience. It is stimulated by reading, listening or in commemoration and festive

5 Peter Sexias, “What is Historical Consciousness,” in Sandwell, ed.. To The Past, p. 11.
6 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
7 Ibid., p. 21.
occasions. The Cuban missile crisis is an interesting intersection between these two types of memories, however, since it is within living memory. Those interviewed for this study have both an autobiographical memory of the event, since they lived through it and can remember where they were when it happened, and a collective memory of the event, as they remember larger events such as what Kennedy was doing in the White House, or Diefenbaker’s indecision. Most important for this study is Halbwachs’ consideration of the past, and of memory of the past, in the present. He wrote that “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present…Collective frameworks are…precisely the instruments used by collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society.”

The version of the past that we tell, therefore, changes according to trends in the present.

In *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, Iwona Irwin-Zareka considers the role of experience in the construction of individual and collective memory. She asks that historians shift attention away from “purely textual ‘readings’ of the contents of collective memory.” She is more interested in “questions about cultural sensibilities and norms that inform both the structure and the texture of remembrance.”

In other words, scholars need to understand how and why certain things are remembered and celebrated, rather than examining the memories themselves. Those are important too, but they are changeable. As Irwin-Zareka puts it, understanding the frames of the remembrances gives a much better sense of what matters:

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to understand how collective memory works, we cannot restrict inquiries to tracing the vicissitudes of historical knowledge or narratives. We must also, and I believe foremost, attend to the construction of our emotional and moral engagement with the past. When looking at public discourse, this translates into questions about *how the past is made to matter*.\(^{11}\)

How does Canadian society, specifically, construct its collective memories? Of what do these consist, and how can this help illuminate the formation of a collective memory about the Cuban missile crisis? Newspapers are a major source of this memory formation process, as they formed a large part of the public narrative surrounding the memory and commemoration of the event. Museums are a second major source of this process, and there are three major museums in Canada which depict the Cuban missile crisis and Canada’s role in the crisis: the Diefenbaker Centre of Canada in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; the Cold War Museum, or “Diefenbunker,” in Carp, Ontario; and the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, Ontario. Museums do not objectively report the past; they interpret it. Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp have written that “every museum exhibition, whatever its overt subject, inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others.”\(^ {12}\) This process is most visible in a museum since quite literally certain parts of the story are on display for patrons to consume. Obviously not everything can be displayed, and some parts of the story have been left out. In addition to newspapers and museums, oral interviews are the most direct way of accessing Canadians’ memories of the Cuban missile crisis. These too have limitations since the nature of time and memory make accurate representation of

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., p. 7, emphasis added.

the past in one individual’s memory difficult. Extensive research on oral histories has shown, however, that even though individual memories can be flawed, taken together, they offer a richness to the study of the past that is invaluable. This chapter also makes use of fictional representation of the missile crisis, including novels and film. However, to look only at Canadian-made sources would be misleading. While this study is certainly about the Canadian perspective of the missile crisis, Canadian culture has been inundated with American perspectives. Films such as Thirteen Days, an American production about the Cuban missile crisis, were viewed by many Canadians. Therefore, my examination of cultural products is selective and limited to those which were popular enough to garner public discussion, wherever they were made.

The Canadian memory of the Cuban missile crisis is complex. There is not a single unified public memory to which we can point as the defining Canadian experience of the missile crisis. Can we even say, then, that there is a national or collective memory of the crisis? Yes and no. It is helpful here to remember Robert Wright’s concept of ambivalence, which is the ability to live with the extreme contrast of opposing ideas. This helps to understand why Canadians can, at the same time, subscribe to competing notions of what the missile crisis meant in Canada. This allows veneration for Kennedy and admiration for Castro to co-exist. At the same time Diefenbaker’s leadership can be continually revised. These competing notions work together in the public narrative to create a history of the crisis in Canada.

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14 Wright, Virtual Sovereignty, p. 15.
“He Held the Line and He Kept the Peace:” Kennedy as a Leader from the Canadian Perspective

The television series *Mad Men* captures well the grief many Americans felt when they heard President Kennedy had been shot in Dallas in November 1963. The show depicts an America so grief-stricken that people cancelled important affairs and sat watching their television sets for the news. Grief and disbelief over his death and admiration of his leadership extended north of the border as well. Anita, recalling his brief term, said “he was very mesmerizing, you know. He captured you, he really did.” She continued, “I thought he was the master at that time.” Diefenbaker paled in comparison: “[Diefenbaker] was a follower as far as Kennedy was concerned… He wasn’t as strong a person as Kennedy was, you know he didn’t have the aura about him.”

What type of leader was President Kennedy? A great deal of research has been done on Kennedy’s self-consciously styled form of leadership. He was explicitly different from his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower. He knew that, in order to win the 1960 election against Richard Nixon, he had to present something new to the country. As Peter Braunstein has written, he represented a “culture of rejuvenation” in which JFK’s good looks and charm, his dynamic cabinet and entourage (which included younger brother Bobby), and Jackie’s immediate ascension to fashion and style maven provided a vivid contrast with the staid and geriatric Eisenhower

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16 Anita, interviewed by the author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
administration…JFK’s administration consciously hammered out an image of constant motion always verging on volatility and crisis. According to K.A. Cuordileone, this culture of rejuvenation was part of the New Frontier, the belief that the United States needed “purposefulness, vigor, determination, self-sacrifice,” and “a new national spirit” which Kennedy could provide. Eisenhower’s administration was old and decaying, and the man himself apparently more concerned with a good game of golf than national prestige and advancement. Kennedy made people believe that Eisenhower’s administration had created a nation of soft and weak citizens that were falling behind in the strategic arms build-up and space race. The passage of time had “brought about a decline in the tough, striving, purposeful spirit that had once characterized the nation’s citizens.” Kennedy was the man who could renew American masculinity and thus restore the nation’s purpose. Kennedy and his handlers contrasted this image with Eisenhower’s, as Robert Dean has argued, without directly attacking the fatherly and still well-loved “Ike.” The direct link between this particular crisis of masculinity and the perception that American power abroad was diminishing was masterfully exploited by Kennedy and his inner circle.

How was this image of President Kennedy consumed and reshaped by Canadian popular opinion, and how did it change? A good example of the range of opinions was published in the Ottawa Citizen, which collected editorial opinions on Kennedy’s actions from a number of Canadian newspapers. The title of this sample, “Newspaper editorial

opinion split on Cuba blockade,” gave an idea of the contents of these various editorials. The opinions ranged from those who believed that Kennedy was needlessly war-mongering to those who believed that he should order air-strikes on Cuba and invade immediately, and every shade in between these two extremes.  

One individual, writing to the editor of the *Calgary Herald*, believed that the whole incident was unnecessary. This letter, simply signed “Observer,” said:

> We may all be truly thankful that the week of war hysteria passed without incident. And, while President Kennedy removes his war paint, and luxuriates in a bath of national egoism, Mr. Khrushchev lolls in a sea of self-satisfaction for having saved, once more, world peace for everyone. Thus, the recent turn of events safeguard human stupidity until the next crisis.

While Kennedy and Khrushchev were especially to blame, there was plenty of it to go around to the entire human race for letting events get out of hand. Nuclear war was the essence of stupidity, this “Observer” believed, and Kennedy was certainly not the hero for saving the world.

After Kennedy’s assassination, his public image underwent what Fred Greenstein terms an “apotheosis.” Criticism that his leadership and volatile style caused the crisis disappeared from Canadian public opinion, and was replaced with sorrow that such a great man should be cut down in the prime of his life. Canadian public discourse perhaps took its cue from the United States. Soon after Kennedy’s assassination, former key advisors of his administration wrote extremely positive works on Kennedy’s life and presidency. The two most important authors in this trend were Arthur Schlesinger and Theodore Sorensen. Schlesinger, author of *The Vital Centre* and various other works on

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American political culture, was a Special Assistant to President Kennedy. He admitted in the introduction to his work that he was more than an advisor; he was a confidant and a close friend of the Kennedy family. In an introduction which praised Kennedy and reminisced on the tragedy of his early demise, Schlesinger reflected that “none of this, I fear, can come close to recapturing the exceptional qualities of John F. Kennedy as a man and as a President. But I hope it will suggest something of the way in which he quickened the heart and mind of the nation, inspired the young, met great crises, led our society to new possibilities of justice and our world to new possibilities of peace and left behind so glowing and imperishable a memory.”

Theodore Sorensen, also a special counselor to President Kennedy, depicted him as strong and decisive. Sorensen also shed any pretense of neutrality or objectivity. “This book, let it be clear at the outset, praises John Kennedy and what he has done, not merely out of loyalty and affection, but out of deep pride and conviction.” He argued that Kennedy was the sort of man who refused to take himself too seriously and who admitted his mistakes, both admirable qualities. “During his days at the White House, he became weary of hearing the cynics say that his personality was more popular than his program. In his view the two were mutually reinforcing and inseparable.” This is the Kennedy that, in the first few years after his assassination, was presented to and consumed by the American, and to a certain extent, the Canadian public as well.

After his assassination, a formerly conflicted Canadian public became less critical of Kennedy. The few still willing to claim he had acted rashly during the missile crisis

26 Ibid., p. 7.
were quickly silenced by a barrage of criticism. One example of this sort of veneration is an editorial from the *Toronto Daily Star* tellingly titled “Loss to all humanity.”

Accompanied by a romanticized portrait of Kennedy (rather than the usual political cartoon, see figure 6.1), the editorial claims that his death was a loss not just for the United States, but for the entire world, as it “sent a tremor of horror and foreboding around the globe.”

During the Berlin and Cuban missile crises, Kennedy showed “admirable calmness and judgment. He defended the essential Western positions firmly, making clear to the Russians that if they crossed a certain line, war was inevitable – and he won his points.” Kennedy had an inherently reasonable and restrained approach to both crises: “…in meeting these challenges he went only as far as was needed. He refrained from unnecessarily provocative action, and he left his adversaries a chance to retreat with minimum loss of face. He held the line and he kept the peace.”

The piece concluded with some gloomy forecasts for the future, since Kennedy’s death left the reins of the county in considerably less experienced and capable hands.

Another newspaper piece that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* immediately after Kennedy’s death looked back at the entire presidency in memorial. This article was arguably more neutral than the editorial from the *Toronto Daily Star* but it was nevertheless extremely positive. It showed how much Kennedy had accomplished in only three years. Re-telling the story of the Cuban missile crisis, the author depicted a calm but stern Kennedy dealing with the threat of missiles in Cuba. In a 1965 letter to the editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*, Jozo Kutlessa wrote that Kennedy “had the courage

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28 Ibid.
and moral backbone to do what was right...Kennedy’s era is a symbol of greatness.

Look at the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. Kennedy was young, valiant, virile, full of zest and gusto of heart and love for all humanity. He was a true intellectual idealist, gentle as a poet, brave as the bravest fighter.”

Even by 1983, two full decades after his death, there was evidence of idealization of Kennedy’s record as a leader during the Cuban missile crisis, although that idealization had been tempered by revisionist trends in United States history. One example of the manner in which his memory changed was an editorial in the Globe and Mail on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his death. While it recognized Kennedy’s limitations – he had a weak legislative record and was responsible for getting the United States involved in Vietnam – it also pointed out that “he brought to the presidency a new spirit and drive. He inspired people with his vision of a ‘new frontier’ of fair play and equal justice for all under the law. He symbolized hope.” During the Cuban missile crisis, “he acquitted himself well.”

Another article on the same occasion looked at the effect that Kennedy’s presidency had on Canadian politics. This article discussed the missile crisis in context of issues on which Kennedy and Diefenbaker disagreed. Pearson had an excellent relationship with Kennedy. “In a personal way and in a political way, his short term of power affected Canadians perhaps more profoundly than any other presidency.” There was something in Kennedy’s style and personality that greatly affected Canadians; “his mystique and his vision captured the Canadian spirit while, simultaneously, his acrimonious attitude toward Mr. Diefenbaker, an attitude prompted

32 Ibid.
largely by provocation, crumbled a Canadian government.”34 These opinion pieces were also published on the twenty-fifth and fortieth anniversaries of his death, as well as when John F. Kennedy, Jr. died in a plane crash in 1990.35 They all had approximately the same message: though flawed, Kennedy was a leader unlike any before or since, and his death was a tragedy for Canadians as much as for the rest of the world.

Part of the myth around the greatness of Kennedy’s leadership for Canadian audiences has been buttressed by cultural products depicting the Cuban missile crisis produced in the years since 1962. There are a number of films which both demonstrate and critique the “Camelot myth,” the notion that Kennedy’s time in office was a golden age and that with the Kennedy deaths, America entered an age of darkness. Two films in this genre in particular deserve special mention for their content and for the manner in which they have been consumed and commented upon in Canada. The first is The Missiles of October (1974) and the other is Thirteen Days (2000). Described as a docudrama, The Missiles of October appeared on television and was the first to recreate for the public what happened during the week of the crisis in Washington and, to a lesser extent, Moscow. Featuring well-known actors such as William Devane and Martin Sheen, it was a tense and more or less historically accurate portrayal of the ExComm meetings, Kennedy’s attempts to control the situation, and Khrushchev’s internal political situation. Kennedy was a man of vision, and while he was in great pain during the crisis, he worried over every step since he knew exactly what failure to negotiate would mean:

34 Ibid.
nuclear war.\textsuperscript{36} This portrayal was in keeping with the heroic narrative. The film received favorable reviews in the Canadian press, such as one written by Blaik Kirby in the \textit{Globe and Mail}. Kirby termed the film “a long one, but it almost never descends into anything you could call theatricalism.” It was also “tight-knit” and “believable. When it ends, you believe you have seen the real thing – the way it really happened.”\textsuperscript{37} Another Canadian review called \textit{The Missiles of October} “an ambitious attempt to bring history alive only 12 years after the fact,” and termed it a faithful reconstruction. This review also claims that it was a “more or less successful attempt to be objective. Kennedy is not glorified.”\textsuperscript{38}

Perhaps because it is a true Hollywood film and enjoyed larger distribution in Canada, \textit{Thirteen Days} was more widely commented upon and is much more accessible to the average viewer. Starring Kevin Costner, Bruce Greenwood, and Steven Culp, \textit{Thirteen Days} is a portrayal of the Cuban missile crisis that takes many more liberties with historical fact than did \textit{The Missiles of October}. Kevin Costner plays Kenny O’Donnell, a fly-on-the-wall character that gives the viewer an entrée into the discussions of the ExComm. Through one-on-one conversations with President Kennedy (played by Greenwood), the viewers are given an entrée into Kennedy’s thoughts during the crisis. Artistic license is taken with the main character, as O’Donnell single-handedly saves the situation on more than one occasion. Here too Kennedy was flawed and human, but still heroic. The film also depicts the fear and anxiety experienced by everyday Americans at the time.\textsuperscript{39} Since it was made well after the end of the Cold War, does that change the way in which we understand the film’s narrative? In a film in which the alleged villains

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{The Missiles of October}, directed by Anthony Page (1974; Viacom Enterprises, 2004), DVD.


\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Thirteen Days}, directed by Roger Donaldson (Montreal: Alliance Atlantis, 2000), DVD.
– Khrushchev, and to a lesser extent, Castro – are never seen, who are the actual villains, and what does that do to the manner in which we understand what it tells Canadians about Kennedy and his government?

A number of reviews of *Thirteen Days* in various Canadian newspapers help to show that this was an accessible film for Canadian audiences. A review in the *Regina Leader-Post*, for instance, noted that the film was a useful parable and not historical fact. While license was taken with the historical record – the military leaders, for instance, are especially trigger-happy in the film – it matters little since things *could* have happened that way, and the overall portrait is realistic. As the author put it, “…serious students of the missile crisis will not go to this movie for additional scholarship, and that for the general public it will play, like Oliver Stone’s *JFK*, as a parable: Things might not have happened exactly like this, but it sure did feel like they did.” Other reviewers of this film found the Canadian connection through actor Bruce Greenwood (he is from Québec) who plays John F. Kennedy.

The most telling discussions of this film are often found within the context of stories on something else. A piece in the *Toronto Star* shortly after the film’s release examined the history of Canadian involvement in the missile crisis. John Ward wrote that “movie-goers are flocking to Kevin Costner’s film *Thirteen Days*, a thriller about the Cuban missile crisis, but few have any idea of the role Canadian ships and planes played in the real-life drama 40 years ago.” While the only explicit Canadian connection in the

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40 Roger Ebert, “‘Thirteen Days’ is a taut thriller even if we know the ending,” *Regina Leader Post*, 13 January 2001, p. D7.
film was Greenwood, he notes, “Canadians were very much involved.” Discussing the recent work of Peter Haydon, *The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: Canadian Involvement Reconsidered*, Ward looks at the crisis from the military perspective, discussing the tension between Kennedy and Diefenbaker as well as the tension within the Canadian cabinet. His conclusion is that Canada’s military role in the successful negotiation of the crisis is forgotten, and as in the film, there is silence on the subject.42

Kennedy’s record has undergone significant transformation and his memory has become part of a myth about greatness and the golden days. The memory of Kennedy’s leadership during the missile crisis is part of the manner in which Canadians think of the past, since American cultural saturation forms a significant part of our popular awareness and understanding of history. Another figure whom Canadians historically associate with the missile crisis, and to whom I will now turn, is Fidel Castro.

**Fidel Castro and Cuba in Canadian Memory of the Missile Crisis**

Fidel Castro and his revolutionaries captured the world’s imagination, whether one agreed or disagreed with their politics and methods. Some Canadians certainly have never stopped thinking about Cuba and Castro over the years. This section will explore how Canadians remember the Cuban missile crisis through their memories of Castro. In the immediate post crisis period, pundits thought the blow to his image could be his downfall. Canadians were and still are conflicted on the subject. Anita, for example, remembered Castro and Che favorably, since they were “trying to help the little

people.”

Mark, on the other hand, was more conflicted in his thinking on Castro and his actions: “I think he was a very charismatic leader. I won’t say he was wise in his decisions, but I think he did what he thought he had to do…in the best interests of the Cuban people.”

These two contemporary opinions on Castro show some of the range—and contradiction—in how Canadians think of the man and his revolution.

Immediately after the Cuban missile crisis ended, various Canadian newspapers published opinion pieces on what the crisis meant for Castro’s continued leadership in Cuba. Some argued that his regime’s power was diminished, but not destroyed. An editorial in the *Toronto Daily Star*, for example, argued that “one of the most important byproducts of the Cuban crisis may be the decline of Premier Fidel Castro’s influence in the rest of Latin America.” His image was tarnished, this argument went, because his role as the champion of the little people and defender of smaller nations from American intrusions was undermined by allowing the Soviet Union to put missiles in Cuba in the first place. He simply switched one behemoth for another. “Premier Castro remains in power in Cuba, but the day when he was accepted as a prophet and liberator in the rest of Latin America may be over.”

Another story—although American in origin—confirmed the same impressions, claiming that, while Castro’s prestige had suffered a big blow because of the missile crisis, “his capacity for trouble-making has not been ended.” British reporter Colin Lawson claimed that “the missile crisis has sunk Fidel Castro’s popularity to its lowest ebb in the four years since he came out of the hills to make the transition from revolutionary hero to dictator of Cuba.”

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43 Anita, interviewed by the author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
44 Mark, interview with the author, Calgary, Alberta, 16 July 2010.
Sun that Cubans were “bewildered” by this change in their leader’s policies, and that there was an increasing belief that Khrushchev let Cuba down.\textsuperscript{47} Perhaps these post-crisis sentiments can best be summarized by the political cartoon which appeared in the Regina Leader-Post the week after the crisis. In this cartoon, a somewhat alarmed looking Castro is gazing at his reflection in a mirror – over which a sign reads “The Crisis” – which is notably smaller than the real life man. The title of this cartoon is revealing: “The shrunken image” (see figure 6.2).\textsuperscript{48}

Perhaps, immediately after the tension eased, it was inevitable that people would conclude Castro would not remain in power for very long. It was, after all, his collusion with Khrushchev that brought the world so close to nuclear war, and how long could the people of Cuba stand for such leadership? But this way of thinking did not take account of some of the successes of the revolution. A few years after the missile crisis, Canadians again began to hear reports of that success, and in this context, belief that Castro’s prestige had diminished began to recede. In 1964, for example, focus pieces in two major newspapers were published which reminded people of gains made by Castro and his revolution, and that blame for the Cuban missile crisis was not all his. An interview published in the Toronto Star, for example, told Castro’s side of the story. Barnard L. Collier spent “seven hectic days and nights travelling around Cuba with Premier Fidel Castro.”\textsuperscript{49} Collier asked Castro about what happened, emphasizing that people in the U.S. probably would never be able to forget that “Cuba very nearly brought on a nuclear war.” Castro replied “The missiles were very logical. To us…for us the dangers of a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{47} “Castro’s Popularity Goes Into Missile-Crisis Spin,” Vancouver Sun, 1 November 1962, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{48} “The shrunken image,” Regina Leader-Post, 5 November 1962, p. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{49} Barnard L. Collier, “Fidel Castro talks,” Toronto Daily Star, 17 August 1964, p. ??
\end{itemize}
conventional war and a world war were the same: the destruction of Cuba – total destruction.” He admitted that he did expect the United States to react badly once they found out about missiles in Cuba, but he believed that it was “correct to run that risk. You see, since the crisis things have become a little more defined.” Though it was dangerous, the crisis forced the United States to promise they would not invade Cuba. According to Castro, an invasion would mean Cuba’s destruction, not simply his own. Thus one could begin to at least understand why Castro acted the way he did in October 1962.

Another focus piece looked at Cuba’s side of the story and examined why relations between the United States and Cuba were so tense. Frederick Nossal, writing in the Globe and Mail, examined the history of Cuba’s revolution as follows: “in the early days of Fidel Castro’s revolution, his friends in the West had great hopes. He stood for a Cuba liberated from the oppressions of a ruthless dictator, Fulgencio Batista. Here was one revolutionary who would not turn to Communism for his inspiration, the Western liberals insisted.” Castro kept the revolution alive almost merely through the force of his personality, described as his “personal magnetism.” The Cuban missile crisis, Nossal writes, was an example of how relations between Canada and the United States were governed largely by emotion, rather than logic and pragmatism. The remainder of the article looks at the reasons why emotion continued to govern the relationship. While fault was assigned to both sides, the United States bore the largest share.

Interest in Castro’s Cuba has ebbed and flowed in Canada, depending on events which brought it back to the forefront of Canadian public discourse. One of these events

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was Expo ’67, in Montreal, where Cuba had a national pavilion which was meant to represent “the youthful spirit of the Cuban Revolution, its openness, gaiety and rapid development in all aspects.” The pavilion endeavored to show the successes of the revolution, with a focus on the economy, industry, education, medical attention and social welfare. An imagined Cuba was present as well: there was a demonstration of the manufacturing of the “famous hand-made Havana cigars” and the pavilion’s restaurant served Daiquiris and Cuba Libres. The connection to Che Guevara was made explicit when, in memory of his recently reported death in Bolivia, the pavilion hung his portrait for display. The portrait memorializing Che’s death was newsworthy enough to gain comment in at least a few Canadian newspapers. The Youth Branch of the New Democratic Party of the University of Alberta even passed a resolution supporting Latin American revolutionary movements.52

Anniversaries of the Cuban revolution have brought, on at least one occasion, assessments of its successes and failures. A ten year retrospective editorial published in 1969 argued that the successes included educational reform, investment in agriculture and livestock, construction of roads and power plants, and creation of social services. This editorial did recognize some of the problems of the revolution, such as persistent American hostility, mass migration from the country, and the number of political prisoners. The overall message, however, was one of remarkable persistence in the face of unfavorable odds. It then asked: “where should Canada stand?” and while there were

51 Description of Cuban Pavilion at Expo ’67, from Descriptions of Expo ’67 Pavilions National and Para-National As Written by the Participants Themselves, LAC, Expo ’67 Fonds, RG-71 Vol. 12, File ARC 71/12/4.
some mildly derogatory comments about Canadian trade relations, the ultimate
conclusion was that “…a bridge of this sort to Cuba could teach Canada, as much as
Latin American states, a lot about an experiment in development which has had its
unusual successes.”

Lana Wylie argues that Canadian popular interest in Cuba rose again in the 1990s
with Prime Minister Jean Chrétien’s visit to the country. News coverage of this trip,
along with other articles on Castro, began to depict the missile crisis as a reason for
Castro’s political endurance. In the 1990s, after the Cold War ended, there was a brief
moment in which normalizations of Cuban-American relations was possible. However,
with the passage of the Helms-Burton Act in 1996, it became clear that the fleeting
opportunity had passed. Newspapers began to talk of Castro’s longevity, and cited the
Cuban missile crisis – and the resulting American promise not to invade – as a reason for
his political endurance. This trend continued into the twenty-first century as talk of
Castro’s (always imminent) retirement surfaced. The ongoing question was the effect his
retirement would have on American-Cuban relations.

What can be concluded from this examination of the memory of the Cuban
missile crisis in relation to Castro? Early commentary on the romantic nature of the
revolution gave way to more pragmatic assessments of both the successes and failures it

53 “Cuba, 10 years after,” Globe and Mail, 1 January 1969, p. 6.
54 Wylie, Perceptions of Cuba, pp. 108-11.
55 Studies of Cuba in what has become known as the Special period are numerous. See for some examples,
Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, ed., Cuba in the Special Period: Culture and Ideology in the 1990s (New
York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Phillip Brenner et al. eds., A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing
the Revolution (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008); Michael Erisman and John Kirk, Redefining
Cuban Foreign Policy: The Impact of the “Special Period” (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida,
2006). On Canada’s relationship with Cuba, see Wright, Our Place in the Sun; Kirk, Back in Business;
Kirk and McKenna, Canada-Cuba Relations.
involved. The Cuban missile crisis was both a success and a failure for Cuba. The crisis nearly caused a nuclear war, but at the same time, it secured the longevity of Castro’s leadership through the American pledge not to invade. Constructions of Kennedy as a leader during the crisis demonstrate one sort of memory of the Cuban missile crisis, and constructions of Castro, another. I will now turn to the manner in which Diefenbaker is remembered, since as Prime Minister during the crisis, he is the political figure most often associated with the crisis in the Canadian discourse, and the crisis was the catalyst for the downfall of his government.

**Dithering Diefenbaker or “Dief the Chief?” Remembering Diefenbaker’s Downfall**

The previous chapter discussed how many Canadians wanted their country to play an international role in the crisis. If Diefenbaker attempted to do just that, why did criticism of his government increase following the missile crisis to such a degree that his minority government was defeated on a vote of non-confidence? This section will explore how Diefenbaker was increasingly depicted as a failure after the Cuban missile crisis. Canadians expected Diefenbaker to represent Canada as a mediator between the powers, as a strong decisive leader who worked towards the cause of peace. However, he was defeated at the polls not long after the crisis. How did Canadians remember his leadership and role during the crisis? How did that contribute to his downfall? It is not simply a question of whether or not Diefenbaker was a good prime minister. Nor is it a matter of whether he was right or wrong in acting the way he did during the missile crisis. Rather, I am interested in how the historical record is created and changes over time. The discussion which follows is largely chronological, in order to demonstrate the
manner in which Diefenbaker’s historical image is one of action and reaction. The contrast between Kennedy and Diefenbaker, and the language used to describe Prime Minister Diefenbaker emerge as important themes. The “Chief” was sometimes painted as weak, senile, doddering, and dithering and sometimes as remarkably visionary and as a man who did a great deal for his country.

As we have seen, Kennedy was self-consciously styled as young, exuberant, vibrant and action-oriented. He convinced the American people that the time for old men in politics had passed, and, tapping into a burgeoning youth movement which would later drive the social revolutions of the 1960s, became the super-masculine leader who would lead the United States into greatness. K.A. Cuordileone has shown how “Kennedy and the vital center politics he embodied represented a new liberal style” which was “distinctly and resolutely masculine…it was a reconciliation of intellect, education, cultural refinement, and liberalism itself with masculine virility.”57 In order to show his purposefulness, vigor and ability to lead, Kennedy contrasted his style with leaders like Eisenhower (and Diefenbaker) whose relevance had faded from American political life. As a result, his image as the tough, vigorous leader was what America needed and expected.58 Janice Cavell has shown how Diefenbaker, in this period became increasingly contrasted not only with Kennedy, but with Pearson. Pearson projected an image of Canada as a strong junior partner, and Diefenbaker’s indecision became associated with the gendering of Canada as weak and feminine. As Cavell argues, “his government was blamed both for subservience to the US and for its delay in accepting

57 Cuordileone, Manhood in American Political Culture, p. 169-170, original emphasis.
58 See also Dean, Imperial Brotherhood.
American-made nuclear weapons on Canadian soil. From either perspective, Diefenbaker’s policies appeared weak and indecisive.”⁵⁹

Scholars have recently examined how gendered language can determine foreign policy more generally. Frank Costigliola has studied the manner in which gendered language used by American officials affected how foreign policy is formulated. The United States was often described as “husband or ‘macho stud,’ the European nations as marriage partners or ravishers, and Russia as America’s masculine competitor who did not ‘fit’ into a post-Cold War nuclear family.”⁶⁰ Language mattered, and “gendered language…maps the supposedly natural inequality of the conventional sex-gender system onto the domain of the Western alliance, thereby further legitimating U.S. hegemony.”⁶¹ Similarly, Betilde V. Muñoz-Pogossian has argued that this thinking also characterized relations between the United States and Latin America in this period. Following in Costigliola’s footsteps, Muñoz-Pogossian argues that “because language conveys symbolic representations of (unequal) power, that is, notions of a superior-subordinate relationship, US officials found it useful to use gender analogies and metaphors when discussing US-Latin American relations.”⁶² The language used to discuss leaders and nations was powerful and conveyed meaning. To discuss “dithering Diefenbaker” then, or Canada as a “weak sister” had a larger meaning.

A letter printed in the Calgary Herald demonstrates this thinking following the crisis extremely well. Canada was the “soft underbelly” of the west at which Khrushchev

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⁵⁹ Cavell, “Like any good wife,” p. 396.
⁶⁰ Frank Costigliola, “The Nuclear Family: Tropes of Gender and Pathology in the Western Alliance,” Diplomatic History 21, 2 (Spring 1997), p. 163.
⁶¹ Ibid., p. 165.
now knew he could strike with ease, and “he will meet little resistance unless Canada changes her way of thinking.” This “Disgusted Canadian” said that he or she was disillusioned by the manner in which Canada had become a “whipping boy” for the rest of the world, and that “in all the years I have lived in Canada I have never seen such a fumbling government.” The only person this person believed to be a strong leader at the moment was Lester Pearson. Believing that the missile crisis had “tested the mettle of our statesmen,” another commentator found “the results depict a sorry sight, indeed. The indecision, backpedalling and muddled thinking displayed by Ottawa and others must warm the cockles of Mr. Khrushchev’s heart.” Mrs. Gay Hemsley from Ottawa summed up this lack of strong Canadian leadership in the most expressive way:

How long will Canadians stand for this flabby leadership? Or have we become such a nation of sheep that we can let ourselves be sheared by the Russian scythe or clawed away by the American eagle without a bleat? How can Canadians and the rest of the world hope to survive when in the entire world there is not one voice strong enough, loud enough to remind mankind of its humanity?

Canada was the “soft underbelly,” “whipping boy” and “weak sister.” Diefenbaker’s “flabby leadership” was contrasted Kennedy’s, which was strong and vigorous. With each passing day Kennedy’s image became stronger, and Diefenbaker was increasingly depicted as weak, feminized and soft.

Diefenbaker, like Eisenhower, belonged to the past, with political leaders like Sir John A. Macdonald. He believed it was in the past that Canada would find its inspiration for the country it could become. He was a powerful orator and fierce debater, but in making his cause well-known and understood to the public, he was no match for

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63 Letter to the editor, signed Disgusted Canadian, Calgary Herald, 8 November 1962, p. 4.
64 Letter to the editor, signed C. Kirk, Edmonton Journal, 31 October 1962, p. 73.
65 Letter to the editor, signed Mrs. Gay Hemsley, Ottawa Citizen, 26 October 1962, p. 6.
Kennedy. Knowlton Nash argues that the differences between the two men were significant. Diefenbaker “was living history, an entrée into the past, filled with old political stories richly embroidered and lovingly told. You came away from a conversation with him with a vivid sense of Canada’s political heroes and vagabonds, triumphs and scandals.” Kennedy, on the other hand, was “exciting, enriching, and demanding, with a sardonic, often self-mocking wit. You came away from a conversation with him with a sense of fun and of being intellectually challenged and stretched.” These were two men that were not destined for a great personal friendship.

However, personal dislike does not necessarily translate into political enmity, so why is such attention always paid to the relationship between the two leaders? According to Nash, “‘hatred’ was the word for the feud between John Kennedy and John Diefenbaker. Never before in Canada-U.S. history has there been such a poisonous and dangerous personality clash as between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Diefenbaker.” Nash’s observations show the personality clash between Kennedy and Diefenbaker made good press; it was scandalous and fantastic and people seemed to love reading about it. But there is more to the story than that, and the manner in which Diefenbaker’s historical memory has been constructed gives some clues as to why. The two men came to personify their countries, and thus they represented some of the larger Canadian-American tensions. Moreover, many Canadians disagreed with what Diefenbaker represented about their country, and as a result, the historical record has changed over the years since his time in office. The Cuban missile crisis, since it acted as

67 Ibid.
68 Ibid., p. 11.
stressor and catalyst for the problems between Canada and the United States, worked as a crucible to demonstrate the formation of Canada’s collective memory.

Thus, in the post-missile crisis period, Canadians increasingly believed that Diefenbaker was no longer capable of clear and decisive leadership. He was responsible for the country’s diminished prestige on the world stage, and was a flabby leader. He made Canada the “soft underbelly” of the western defence system. In short, he was a fumbling old man that could no longer be trusted with the leadership. Canadians also read of Diefenbaker’s embarrassing actions on the world stage. In early January, Diefenbaker attended a meeting in the Bahamas between British Prime Minister Macmillan and President Kennedy. In his memoirs, Diefenbaker recalls that he was invited by Macmillan; since the latter could not make it to Canada, he invited Diefenbaker to join them in the Bahamas. However, the Canadian press thought differently of the meeting. Charles Lynch, not someone who usually wrote in praise of Diefenbaker, argued that “Prime Minister Diefenbaker, returning from his Bahamas holiday today, will not be surprised to find mixed reactions in the country to his latest exercise in statesmanship.” Lynch argued that “there are those who feel he demeaned himself and his high office by horning in as he did on the ‘little summit’ staged in Nassau by President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan.”

As we have seen, Diefenbaker continued to refuse to accept nuclear weapons on Canadian soil, despite the fact that the Canadian public was beginning to be more in

69 Letter to the editor, Calgary Herald, 8 November 1962, p. 4.
70 Diefenbaker, Memoirs, vol. III, p. 95
favour of accepting them. Lester Person, however, was able to read public opinion in a
more astute manner, and in January 1963 announced that the Liberal party was now in
favour of accepting nuclear weapons and living up to Canada’s defence commitments.
Previously, the Liberals had been aligned with the other parties in their policy that
nuclear arms should not be accepted on Canadian soil. In January, he declared: “to say
that, on moral grounds, we will not accept any nuclear weapons in any circumstances is
dishonest and hypocritical unless we are at the same time willing to withdraw from
NATO and refuse to export, to anyone, uranium for military purposes.” The writing
was now on the wall and the lines for the next election drawn. Various political histories
have chronicled what happened next; Diefenbaker, continued to refuse nuclear arms for
Canada. This, in addition to portrayals of him as indecisive which undermined his
credibility, contributed to his defeat in a non-confidence vote in February. He
subsequently lost the election to Pearson’s Liberals in April 1963.

Once he was out of office, how was Diefenbaker’s leadership during the Cuban
missile crisis remembered? According to an editorial in the Winnipeg Free Press one
year after the crisis, the biggest lesson to be learned from the crisis was that the entire
Canadian political system failed, and the principle of collective security was
compromised. The Cuban confrontation, this article argued, “marked a turning point in
world history.” The primary lesson from a Canadian standpoint was that “we must in
future be prepared to respond more quickly and resolutely when the principle of

72 McMahon, Essence of Indecision, p. 153.
collective security is put to the test, as it assuredly was last October 22.”

This editorial argued that Diefenbaker’s indecision for three full days after the world found out there were missiles in Cuba was inexcusable, and his suggestion that a UN team be sent to Cuba was insulting to the United States. To conclude, “it is a record of which no Canadian can be proud and many found deeply humiliating.” Here, criticism was leveled not just at Diefenbaker, but rather the entire Canadian political system, as “their procrastination and equivocation was unhappily a fairly accurate reflection of initial feeling in Parliament as a whole.”

The next shift in thinking regarding Canada’s role in the Cuban missile crisis comes from George Grant’s *Lament for a Nation*. In his treatise on the state of Canadian politics, Grant argues there is plenty of blame to go around for the death of a Canada that could have been free of the homogenizing force of the United States. For Grant, “lamenting for Canada is inevitably associated with the tragedy of Diefenbaker. His inability to govern is linked with the inability of this country to be sovereign.”

Grant does recognize that Diefenbaker, however out of time he was, did not fail because of “the foibles of his personality” as some journalists would have it, but rather because there were conflicts of principles involved. *Lament for A Nation* argues that it was during Diefenbaker’s time in office that Canada had a chance to become a modern, independent nation free of American influence. While Diefenbaker stood in the way of the American forces, he did so for backward reasons. His demise meant the demise of the Canada that Grant wanted to see, but because the country rejected him and not the forces of

75 Ibid.
continentalization, the chance to be truly independent was lost. The Diefenbaker Grant attempts to come to terms with is a man not of indecision, but of principles, however much Grant disagreed with those principles.

Peter C. Newman’s review of Lament for A Nation in the Toronto Daily Star took Grant to task for being so kind to Diefenbaker’s record as Prime Minister. Calling Diefenbaker Grant’s “hero,” Newman cited what he believed was the key paragraph of Grant’s work. Diefenbaker’s nationalism, to Grant, was a deeply held principle “for which he would fight with great courage and would sacrifice political advantage.”

Newman called this a “wild distortion of events,” and that “in the Cuban crisis, Diefenbaker’s chief accomplishment was to isolate Canada as the only western nation which did not immediately respond to President Kennedy’s plea for support. It was his pathological indecision, not nationalism, which prompted Diefenbaker’s stand.” Grant might have responded that Newman was missing the point, and regressing back to a position which blamed Diefenbaker’s personality rather than trying to understand the underlying principles. In any event, these were two competing notions of Diefenbaker’s

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77 Grant’s treatise on the failure of Canadian nationalism in a modern world is part of a larger shift and discussion regarding Canadian politics and identity in the late 1960s. For a discussion of this process, see Wright, Virtual Sovereignty, for an excellent discussion of this complexities of Canadian nationalism throughout the twentieth century. This interpretation of Grant’s Lament was the result of correspondence with Josh Col, electronic message to the author, 26 July 2011.


79 Ibid., p. 43.

80 Newman, “The new defence of Diefenbaker.” Newman was not the only influential public persona making these sorts of attacks on Diefenbaker. See John Dafoe, “Professor says Gordon an economic jingoist,” Globe and Mail, 16 May 1968, p. 8 for a discussion of Peyton V. Lyon’s attacks at a Young Progressive Conservative Thinkers’ Conference in 1968. H. Basil Robinson, who worked closely with Diefenbaker as a liaison between the PMO and External Affairs, defends his actions, or at least seeks to explain them in his work Diefenbaker’s World: A Populist in Foreign Affairs (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).
motivations during the missile crisis which emerged in public discussion. Neither was particularly favorable.

Perhaps this is why Diefenbaker felt he needed to clarify the record and explain his actions. As early as October 1967, Diefenbaker indicated that he wished Canadians to know his side of the story. This was the first time he personally and publicly revealed the details regarding his delay in supporting the United States during the crisis; what his critics called dithering. In a press conference, he stated that the reason for the so-called dithering was that he was not properly consulted as an ally in Kennedy’s decision making process. He had made allusions to this before, and the press and Canadians had certainly caught on to his fervent belief that no consultation meant no immediate response.81 He insisted there was no consultation whatsoever: “Mr. Kennedy wanted him to declare a national emergency in Canada that very afternoon – Oct. 22 1962. ‘He thought that what he wanted Canada to do, we would do,’ Mr. Diefenbaker said.”82

Diefenbaker further developed this argument in his memoirs ten years later. Throughout the three volumes, he addressed various criticisms that had been leveled against him since his defeat in 1963.83 He wrote about the nuclear weapons issue and defended his policy of non-acceptance. He insisted that the agreement between Canada and the United States was informal, and that “we agreed that detailed arrangements on all aspects of this matter should be worked out and embodied in agreements ready for

execution *when conditions made it necessary.*” In other words, he believed there was an agreement to make an agreement, and the plan should only be put into action when it was absolutely necessary, such as in an emergency. Far more important to Diefenbaker, evidenced by the number of times he returned to them, were the issues of consultation and Canadian sovereignty.

Kennedy and his actions during the Cuban missile crisis are treated in the second volume. Diefenbaker insisted that Kennedy assured him that the allies would always be consulted, and in particular that American leaders would always consult with their Canadian counterparts before doing anything. Consultation, he argued, was important for the United States and Canada’s dealings with each other, because the two countries were mutually threatened: “geography and the nature of modern weapons made it essential; our common viewpoints and mutual confidence made it possible,” but because there were inevitably differences on individual matters, “consultation on general policies as well as on particular questions was always necessary.” While this seems to be a general commentary on the importance of consultation, the meaning behind these words is clear when understood in the context of his comments about the manner in which the United States dealt with Canada during the crisis. Toward the beginning of the third volume, he states that he is going to let the “interested reader…judge not only the propriety of our politics but the price of Canadian independence. We made it abundantly clear to Washington that while our basic attitude was co-operation ever, we were determined on a

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course which represented a new stand for Canada: subservience never." He fervently believed Canada should have been informed of what was happening more than only a few hours in advance, and that the blame for defaulting on NORAD commitments was Kennedy’s. “It was the Kennedy government that rendered our joint arrangements ineffective. We were not a satellite state at the beck and call of an imperial master.”

This volume of his memoirs is most remarkable for its tone. Diefenbaker spent a great deal of time assigning blame for his defeat, which rested entirely with the “eastern establishment,” Pearson’s reckless desire for power, the liberal press, and factions within his own party that rebelled against him.

Douglas Harkness, Minister of Defence during the crisis and advocate for arming Canada’s Bomars with nuclear warheads, refused to let Diefenbaker’s memoirs stand as the final say on the matter. In a direct rebuttal to the version of the missile crisis and nuclear weapons issue that Diefenbaker presented, Harkness published his own version of the story in newspapers across the country, entitled “The Harkness Papers.” This three-part story ran in the Ottawa Citizen, the Globe and Mail, and the Calgary Herald, among others. Harkness recounted a summary of events from his point of view, but the salient points can be summarized as follows. He argued that the Cuban missile crisis played a significant role in Diefenbaker’s downfall, since the government fell over the nuclear weapons issue. Harkness and Green were the two individuals present in the afternoon meeting where Livingston Merchant informed Diefenbaker of the missiles in Cuba and of what the United States was planning. At that time, he remembered Diefenbaker telling Merchant that Canada would live up to its NORAD and NATO responsibilities.

86 Ibid., p. 16.
87 Ibid., p. 82.
However, after Kennedy’s speech, Harkness asked to raise the official level of alert and bring the Canadian military on par with the American, Diefenbaker backpedalled, and claimed that the decision was not his alone, and needed to be made by the Cabinet. Tuesday morning’s Cabinet meeting yielded no results, and Diefenbaker told Harkness he did not yet wish to raise the level of alert. Harkness thought it was “chiefly…because of his distaste for taking a hard decision.” After more tense meetings and some harsh words between Harkness and Diefenbaker, a decision was finally made and the level of alert officially raised. But for Harkness, “the Cuban Affair shook the confidence of a number of the cabinet in the prime minister and the faith of all in him was, I believe, never restored to what it had been.” The remainder of “The Harkness Papers” brings the story to the end of Diefenbaker’s term as Prime Minister, and shows how Harkness came to believe that Canada needed to arm its Bomars and play its role in continental defence, so much so that he finally resigned over the issue in early 1963.

Harkness and Diefenbaker had a political stake in their retelling of events, or at least an interest in how they and their political records would be remembered. Diefenbaker’s critics painted him as indecisive and embarrassing. This he tried to counter with his own version of events, but Harkness’ memories were published quickly to refute Diefenbaker’s version, and thus the give and take of the historical record continued. By the 1980s and 1990s, first-person narratives faded from the record, and the historians and retrospective journalism pieces took over. Rather than focusing on political issues, or the foibles of Diefenbaker’s personality, these versions of the Cuban missile crisis paid greater attention to the implications of the historical moment.

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89 Ibid.
In 1992, on the thirtieth anniversary of the missile crisis, political scientist Don Munton wrote that the missile crisis could be understood as a trauma in Canadian-American relations. While he noted the traditional interpretation of the crisis – Kennedy’s “resolute action” and Diefenbaker’s indecision – he also recognized that the Canadian military played a greater role in the successful resolution of the crisis than had previously been recognized. Munton also suggested an important revision in the Diefenbaker narrative. Examining Diefenbaker’s performance during the crisis, Munton noted that the Prime Minister’s suggestion for a UN-inspection team was not an insult to Kennedy as had previously been classified, but rather it was a “classic Canadian response…the irony is that had the Canadian government been consulted properly, Diefenbaker, Cold Warrior that he was, would likely have approved firm action over the Soviet missiles.”90 The Cuban situation, in addition, was needlessly hostile, provoked “by the dangerous state of domestic American public and elite hostility toward Cuba.”91 His concluding words were worth noting for their call for revision:

The Cuban missile crisis has for decades been considered the classic textbook case of coercive diplomacy, of how to pressure an adversary under the threat of nuclear war. In Canada it has also been commonly considered a major failure of the Diefenbaker government. It was neither. The textbooks now have to be rewritten. So do the popular memories.92

Those who preferred tell the story of an indecisive and weak Diefenbaker were still present, however. Peyton Lyon, for example, rebutted Munton’s article a few weeks later. Lyon, a political scientist at Carleton University, called Munton’s interpretation as “revisionism at its most heroic,” and Diefenbaker “the weakest prime minister in our

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
Diefenbaker’s weakness and incompetence were demonstrated by the missile crisis, and Lyon did not find Munton’s revisionism persuasive. As he put it, “nothing was gained by Diefenbaker’s wobbly performance, absolutely nothing. The ‘textbooks’ got it right.”

Revision of the historical record had nevertheless begun and continued in the early 1990s when the National Archives released the Cabinet records from the week of the crisis. A series of newspaper articles were published which suggested that, while people thought Diefenbaker was being indecisive, he was actually being cautious and strongly believed he was standing up to the United States. A story published in February 1993 by Conservative supporter and journalist Dalton Camp argued that, in light of these records, Diefenbaker’s motives were understandable, even if they were still controversial. Diefenbaker strongly believed his reaction to Kennedy’s demands were in the best interest of the independence of the country. However, Camp notes that the story is bittersweet. Although Diefenbaker dithered in search of an independent Canadian policy, it was not what the majority of Canadians at the time actually wanted. It is arguable that most Canadians during the crisis supported Kennedy (though we have seen that there was indeed some dissent). If he had taken a different stand, Diefenbaker perhaps would have stayed in office longer. Another story covering the release of the documents agreed with the interpretation that the Prime Minister truly thought he was standing up for an independent foreign policy. According to this story, “the cabinet minutes show a

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94 Ibid.
cautious Mr. Diefenbaker, a man not ready to be dragged into a U.S. adventure and certainly not prepared to chart a neutral course for Canada.\textsuperscript{96}

Where does the Diefenbaker image lie today? What do Canadians think when they look back on his leadership during the Cuban missile crisis? Perhaps the two major museums in Canada that depict the crisis can give some indication as to how Canada remembers the crisis. The Diefenbaker Centre of Canada (DCC), located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, is one of the most important sources of information regarding Diefenbaker and his life and office. His prime ministerial records are there, as is a museum which tells his life story. There is also a replica of his office and cabinet meeting room with the original furniture. The “Diefenbaker” which the DCC presents to the Canadian public is, overall, a balanced portrait. While the museum clearly presents a positive image of the Prime Minister, it is nevertheless critical of the historical record as well.

The most interesting panels of information tell of Diefenbaker’s relationship with President Kennedy and the Cuban missile crisis. The personality clash between the two men is given prominence, with such panel titles as “Fallout on the 49\textsuperscript{th} Parallel.”\textsuperscript{97} Canadian-American relations have always been important to Canadians, the museum says, but the relationship between Kennedy and Diefenbaker “started off poorly,” and “continued on a downward spiral. Never before, or since, have relations between a Canadian Prime Minister and an American President been as frosty as they were between 1961 and 1963.”\textsuperscript{98} The exhibit crafts the story of enmity between the two men, beginning with Diefenbaker’s visit to Washington. On that visit, Diefenbaker commented on a fish

\textsuperscript{97} “Fallout on the 49\textsuperscript{th} Parallel,” panel text, Diefenbaker Center of Canada, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.
mounted on the wall of Kennedy’s office, and said that he had recently caught a bigger one, about 140 lbs., in Jamaica. When Kennedy voiced his disbelief at the size, Diefenbaker resolved to have the fish stuffed and mounted in his office in Ottawa, which it was, just in time for Kennedy’s return visit. The fish is on display at the Diefenbaker Centre, in the replica of the Prime Minister’s office. In this display of machismo between the two leaders, the rhetorical impulse of Cold War masculinity is obvious.99

The story of the “push” memo is also told in the DCC. After a meeting in Ottawa, Kennedy accidentally left behind a memo which had been prepared for him as an agenda. It said that the Americans want to push Diefenbaker on a number of initiatives, such as joining the OAS. Diefenbaker found the forgotten memo after the meeting and was reportedly incensed by repeated use of the word push. Proper etiquette dictated that he should have returned the memo, but instead he kept it as potential ammunition. Kennedy’s aides were incensed by it, since they felt it was tantamount to blackmail, and unbecoming of Diefenbaker’s high office. The overall impression received from these panels is that the dislike between Kennedy and Diefenbaker was the determining factor in Canadian-American relations in the period. It is no surprise, then, that the panel dealing specifically with the missile crisis picks up on this theme of the personal enmity between the two men as the driving factor. In the panel entitled “The Cuban Missile Crisis and Beyond,” we learn that “Diefenbaker was supportive of American action during the crisis, but did not give them the unequivocal support that Kennedy had expected.” In addition, it mentions the UN suggestion, and Diefenbaker’s refusal to raise the alert level,

99 See Cuordileone, Manhood and American Political Culture, especially pp. 167-236 for a discussion of the manner in which Kennedy’s popular public persona was intricately connected with masculinity.
concluding that “ultimately, Diefenbaker thought that Kennedy’s ‘arrogance’ had
endangered North America and could have resulted in nuclear war.”100

Another major museum which treats the Cuban missile crisis is the War Museum
in Ottawa, Ontario. While I will discuss this exhibit in more detail below, here it is worth
noting that rather than focus on the personality clash between Kennedy and Diefenbaker,
the War Museum considers the Cuban missile crisis in the context of its larger defence
and security partnerships, as well as in the context of the Canadian political landscape.
Indeed, there is far more discussion of the split Cabinet and of the security implications
of nuclear weapons on Cuba, than of Kennedy and Diefenbaker’s mutual hostility. In
addition, the War Museum presents the historiographical debate regarding Diefenbaker
and the missile crisis through a debate wheel, which presents the opinions of various
politicians at the time, as well as editorial opinion. The War Museum exhibit also looks
at one final element of the Cuban missile crisis not yet addressed –fear.

Thus far we have examined some of the range of Canadian memory of the Cuban
missile crisis by looking at the manner in which the politicians involved in the crisis were
remembered. Looking at collective memory through Kennedy, Castro, and Diefenbaker
misses one key aspect of the Cuban missile crisis that Canadians remember. That aspect
is fear, and is the subject to which I will now turn.

100 “The Cuban Missile Crisis and Beyond,” panel text, Diefenbaker Center of Canada, Saskatoon,
Saskatchewan.
“It Was A Scary, Scary Time:” Fear and Canadian Memories of the Cuban Missile Crisis

Canadian author Ann-Marie MacDonald has written the only well-known literary treatment of the Cuban missile crisis in Canada.\textsuperscript{101} Her novel *The Way the Crow Flies* is a chilling testament to growing up during those years of tension and fear. While it is a commentary on the Steven Truscott case of 1959, MacDonald changes the setting to October 1962. The story is told through the eyes of eight-year-old, Madeleine McCarthy. Set in Centralia, an air force base in Southern Ontario, the book follows the McCarthy family as they just arrive on base. Life is seemingly picture perfect and, despite the fact they are on an air force base, it is the stereotypical dream suburban family. Madeleine’s family has a car, a beautiful mother and father who still love each other, and a brother who occasionally irritates her. Despite the eccentric Froelich family across the street, the base is the image of perfection as well. Except that the novel is largely a commentary on the fact that this period and this family were not perfect.

Madeleine is soon subjected to abuse doled out by her teacher, Mr. March, who keeps her after school to do “backbends” designed to get the blood flowing to the brain and thus “improve her grades.” Though the after-three exercise group leaves a sick feeling in her stomach, she keeps it a secret, since her grades are improving. Eventually, the backbends progress to touching and, eventually, to Mr. March “stabbing” her. This happens towards the end of October, on the same day they do duck-and-cover drills in

\textsuperscript{101} For example, there is a novel by David Elias, *Sunday Afternoon* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2004), which uses the missile crisis as a setting (but, incidentally, puts the day of Kennedy’s televised speech on a Sunday, rather than Monday), and another novel by Barbara Gowdy, *Falling Angels* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1989) which treats fear of the bomb and the idea of fallout shelters, but neither are particularly well-known or as specific to the subject matter as MacDonald’s novel.
school. She does not really know what is happening between the United States and Russia, but she does notice that it’s being talked about on television and in the newspapers her father reads. When her parents notice that night she is upset, they assume it’s because of the unnecessary and terrifying civil defence drills, and her father, Jack, resolves to speak to Mr. March the following day, right at three o’clock. Unfortunately, he gets waylaid due to his own secrets; a spy from Germany who was defecting to the United States through Canada had arrived, and Jack had agreed to meet him. Eventually, Madeleine acts out and vandalizes the school on Halloween night, which scares Mr. March enough that he lets her stop coming to the “after three” group. Nevertheless, the abuse continues for the other girls in her class, and eventually, a young girl is murdered. The remainder of the book looks at the case of 14-year-old Ricky Froelich, who is tried and convicted for the murder. Even though both Jack and Madeleine have information that would prove Froelich innocent, neither of them come forward.

The slightly queasy feeling that Madelaine gets in her stomach when she thinks of Mr. March is a metaphor for the slightly queasy feeling we all get when thinking about how close the world came to nuclear war. Thus book’s message can be summarized with the words used to conclude it, which are worth quoting at length:

An air-raid siren is a beam of sound more terrifying than any other. During the Second World War it was terrifying but now it is more terrifying, because it was a normal sunny day until the siren went off. Birds were flying, the fields were buzzing and kids were riding bikes. The siren screams over wading pools and backyard barbecues, it says, I was here all along, you knew this could happen. It pauses for breath, resumes its pitiful rise, mourning its own obscenity, mounting to obliteration. It is everywhere – it makes all places into the same place, turns everyone into the same person. It says, Run to where there is no shelter. When the planes come, run, but only because you are alive and an animal.
And then it stops. The summer sky is empty. Turn on the radio, the television. Come up from the basement, get up from the ground.\textsuperscript{102}

In oral interviews done with those who lived through the crisis, fear and a feeling of unreality were defining emotions. Anita, with whom this chapter opened, placed specific emphasis on her memories of fear. She said, “it was a scary, scary time….it was like living in the black hole, you know?”\textsuperscript{103} Here, I will look at general memories and stories of that fear, then examine these memories through stories about fallout shelters. I will also look at how museums such as Canada’s Cold War Museum, or the “Diefenbunker” have memorialized that fear.

Twenty-five years after the Cuban missile crisis, a journalist for the \textit{St. John’s Evening Telegram} recalled that he was in Mexico on assignment when the news broke about the missiles in Cuba. He remembered the Canadian Ambassador to Mexico asked him, if war did break out, to stay and help him round up the Canadians in the country. He also noted that even though Mexico was much closer to Cuba than Canada, Mexicans did not really pay any special attention to the crisis, and “most Mexicans really couldn’t have cared less.”\textsuperscript{104} There, the crisis manifested as “deep-set anti-Americanism” and support for Castro. Harbron wrote, “only after phoning home long distance from Mexico City, did I get a real sense of imminent doom – when my wife told me that kids across Canada were practicing air raid protection measures in their school classrooms.”\textsuperscript{105} While he goes on to note that another generation has come to adulthood since October 1962, and Kennedy’s actions are studied in classrooms as an excellent example of crisis

\textsuperscript{103} Anita, interview with the author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
management, “…for me, as for tens of millions who do remember, the events of 25 years ago still raise a shudder when I recall how close our world came to nuclear destruction.”\textsuperscript{106}

Another individual’s memory was prompted by a story which ran in the \textit{Vancouver Sun} called “Dr. Doom Is In.” This memory, which, according to the author “has bubbled just below my consciousness,” was of the “‘bizarre state of suspended animation’ that prevailed when the superpowers were on a collision course toward an apocalyptic outcome,” otherwise known as the Cuban missile crisis.\textsuperscript{107} Author Ken Wallace remembers that, as a student at West Van Senior secondary, he sat in the lunch room listening while the details and progress of the crisis were broadcast over the PA system. “We sat eating, not talking, confused and bewildered. The walk home was made up of conversation about what to do when the air raid sirens signaled the end.” He remembers, however, when the sirens did go off.

For me all speculation about what would happen when the sirens sounded ended when, at around 6 o’clock the next morning, a nearby air raid siren did start wailing. I got up from bed and stood at my second story window. All the training – diving under school desks, racing for the basement – was not at the centre of my attention. As I stood gazing at the dull grey scene, I saw nobody running amok or cars charging up to be the first on the highway. Everything remained still.\textsuperscript{108}

Perhaps others in Vancouver who heard the sirens felt the same way. Across the country during that week, a few false alarms made the news; the only remarkable thing about these sirens is that they were reported at all, which perhaps shows that people did have that moment of panic, that jolt of adrenaline when they thought, for a brief moment, this was it.

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
In the context of a film review of *Thirteen Days*, another individual, James P. Delgado, recalled growing up in the United States at the time of the crisis. He remembered the dangers of fallout, in particular, and how those who managed to survive the initial bombs would have been “burned, irradiated, and envying the dead as we climbed out of the rubble and faced the onset of a nuclear winter.” Having just returned from a three-week cultural exchange with Cuban historians and museum directors, Delgado was able to speak from a quasi-Cuban perspective as well, since Cubans have good historical reason to fear American intervention. As Delgado observes, “In many ways the Cuban adult and school child of today lives on an island that seems stopped in time, not only in terms of classic automobiles and 1950s technology. In Cuba the tensions and fears of that missile crisis have not faded as completely as they have for many Americans.” Thus the popular Hollywood film brought back memories for him, but also spoke to the current situation between the United States and Cuba.

One last testimony of memory of nuclear fear shows a Canadian slant. Jean Smith Cavalluzzo wrote of her memory of the crisis and decided that Queen Elizabeth would make an excellent referee in the global situation. A student in grade seven at Toronto’s St. Joseph’s elementary school at the time, Cavalluzzo specifically remembers “nervously listening to Sister G’s ominous words over the public address system: “Let us pray for World Peace. Let us also pray that Castro and Khrushchev find God.” Her child’s imagination then took over, and she remembered thinking that World War III

110 Ibid.
would start “when Kennedy and Khrushchev press some little red button on their desks” and considered ducking under her desk for protection if there was an attack. However, there was also a sense of hope, as they started a prayer for the end of the crisis, and Cavalluzzo remembered seeing the portrait of the Queen on the wall. She thought, surely the Queen could be a referee in this crisis, and remembered “I assure myself that the Queen’s regally benevolent yet cold gaze [would] divert missiles away from our pink blob of land mass on the map.” Then she recited “God save the Queen” quietly to herself.¹¹²

Memories of fallout shelters are also often associated with the Cuban missile crisis, probably because that was the one time that Canadians might have had to use them.¹¹³ Only one of the people interviewed for this study remembers preparing a shelter of sorts under her stairs. In reaction to the crisis, Anita bought canned goods, lots of batteries for the flashlights, candles, bedding. She also remembered thinking about the logistics of how they would go about getting fresh water, diapers for the children, and so on. Even while making these preparations, she recalled being aware that “nothing was going to save you, as far as we were concerned.”¹¹⁴ This was a larger phenomenon too. Historians have charted the manner in which fallout shelters were constructed, even though the futility of building one was widely recognized.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid.
¹¹³ On the extent to which the Canadian public invested in shelters, see Burtch, “If We Are Attacked,” pp. 290-338.
¹¹⁴ Anita, interview with the author, Foam Lake, Saskatchewan, 24 July 2010.
¹¹⁵ There is a great deal of research that has been done on fallout shelters in the American context. See, for example, Davis, Stages of Emergency; Sarah A. Lichtman, “Do-It-Yourself Security: Safety, Gender, and the Home Fallout Shelter in Cold War America,” Journal of Design History 19, 1 (2000): 39-55; Monteyne, Fallout Shelter; and Rose, One Nation Underground.
John Moore also remembered the confusion about fallout shelters in his piece on the missile crisis, published in the *Vancouver Sun*. He remembered that in the fall of 1962,

Tall grey sirens appeared among the firs in my North Vancouver neighbourhood, and air raid drills were held at school. I was 12 and having bad dreams. The headlines on the newspapers I delivered had gone from grim to apocalyptic...

Remembering his days as a newspaper delivery boy, Moore told the story of a man in his neighborhood from whom he could not collect money for the paper, since he was always out back in his bomb shelter, and Moore was afraid of knocking there for fear of being greeted with a shotgun. Young Moore used to read the papers he delivered, and idolized Fidel Castro. A copy of *The Communist Manifesto* under his bed, he used to imagine what it would be like to be Castro’s paperboy. Then the missile crisis broke out, and he remembered carrying a newspaper with the headline, “RCAF put on alert in Cuba Crisis. Ottawa to support U.S. all the way.” He wrote, “I imagined Fidel amusing his comrades by quaking in mock terror, ‘Madre Dios! Not the Canadians!’ while cackling at the front page story that the UBC engineers, famous for public pranks, had executed him in effigy before a firing squad of water pistols.”

He came to the house of “The Nut,” as he had become known, thought to be crazy for building a shelter in the backyard, and knocked, intending to pick up the money for the previous months of newspapers. When let inside, he got a first-hand view of some of the anxiety and tension people were feeling at the thought of imminent atomic attack, when his neighbour

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116 John Moore, “I Was Castro’s Paperboy: Twenty-eight years ago, while delivering the Vancouver Sun, John Moore Came to know more than he wanted to about the Cuban Missile Crisis,” *Vancouver Sun*, 4 November 2000, p. H5.

117 Ibid.
gestured to the walls of newsprint surrounding us. ‘This tells them nothing about what will really happen!’ he thundered like a prophet, ‘there will be a shock like an earthquake! Wind like a hurricane of fire! Buildings will turn to dust in an instant! There will be nothing left of most people but shadows burned into collapsing walls! Skin will turn black and peel off in an instant! Flesh will melt! Bones will turn to ash and be blown away before they can fall to the ground!’ His eyes glowed like two pellets of plutonium. I held my collection book up in front of my [sic] like a pathetically inadequate radiation shield.\(^{118}\)

Alongside the colorful description and vivid memory, what emerges is the horror of his neighbor’s message. Having seen the carnage caused by the explosions at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this man was desperately trying to tell the only individual who would listen, the young Moore, of what might happen if the politicians lost control of the situation.

Fallout shelters are still in evidence in Canada today. Edmonton, for example, has a shelter which is now sealed due to structural damage.\(^{119}\) The *Edmonton Journal* also reported on a fallout shelter which exists in the basement of an Edmonton home, for which the current owner has no use.\(^{120}\) There are likely more stories across the country of these concrete bunkers, that now serve no other purpose than as odd relics of the past. However, there is one remaining nuclear bunker in Canada, which is open to the public, and has become a museum of that period.

Officially called Canada’s Cold War Museum, this site has been unofficially dubbed the “Diefenbunker,” to the embarrassment of Prime Minister Diefenbaker, under whose authority the supposedly top-secret bunker was constructed. Built in the 1950s as a part of the government’s plan for continuity in the event of nuclear war, the Diefenbunker is a massive, four-story underground bunker outfitted with everything

\(^{118}\) Ibid.
required to house the government underground for two weeks. According to Doug Beaton, Collections Manager of the site, the purpose of the building is to show patrons the unique architectural features of the building itself, as well as the facilities inside which would have provided food, fuel, communication with the outside world, medical assistance, and so on.\textsuperscript{121} The museum does both self-guided and guided tours (the self-guided tour is available on the website),\textsuperscript{122} and the overall message Beaton hopes people understand when they leave the bunker is “an appreciation of the destructive potential of atomic/nuclear bombs, who would be in this emergency [government] and what was expected of them, a partial understanding of the levels of civil defence and some of the features of the Diefenbunker.”\textsuperscript{123}

This message resonates on every level of the Diefenbunker’s construction, both literally and figuratively. Its location – about half an hour’s drive west of the nation’s capital, Ottawa – was chosen because it was far enough away to be out of the initial blast zone, if a bomb were dropped on the city, but close enough that the government could get there by helicopter. It was west of the city, because the bunker needed to be out of the path of fallout, given prevailing wind patterns. Upon approaching the bunker, all one can see above ground is the guardhouse – equipped with its own emergency bunker, for whoever was unlucky enough to be on duty out there at the time – and the entrance to the blast tunnel. This is a large tunnel which leads underground to the main entrance, and was designed to allow the force of any nearby explosion pass by the bunker’s door without damaging the bunker itself. Once entering, the patron is taken through the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{121}{Doug Beaton, email correspondence with the author, 11 July 2011.}
\footnotetext{122}{See http://diefenbunker.ca/pages/avtour/index.shtml.}
\footnotetext{123}{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
decontamination area, to experience what a person would have had to undergo if they were caught outside during a blast; all clothing, as well as a few layers of skin, would be shed. The first floor of the bunker holds the medical facilities as well as several exhibits which detail life in the bunker, civil defence initiatives, communications equipment, and so on. The bunker has a mess which would have served food, and unique air filtration systems which would have provided the air. It would have been able to hold a few hundred personnel, on a hot-bunk rotating system, in the event of a nuclear attack. It also has a massive vault that was meant to store gold from the Bank of Canada, and a radio station which would have sent out messages to the general population with information on what was happening. When one takes all these details into consideration, it is a chilling souvenir of what the world might have faced in the event of nuclear war. It is one of the best reminders Canadians have today that their country was indeed a member of some important defence alliances which could have taken their country to war, and the fear and anxiety experienced by Canadians during the missile crisis is testament to that fact.

The other Canadian museum which shows some of the fear of the nuclear age in Canada is the War Museum in Ottawa. As we have seen, the overall message about the Cuban missile crisis that the War Museum presents to patrons is that it should be understood within the context of Canada’s defence relationships, according to Dr. Andrew Burtch, post-second world war expert and historian at the Museum. The exhibit tells the story of the difference of opinion between Minister of Defence Harkness and Minister of External Affairs Green. It shows some of the personal animosity between Kennedy and Diefenbaker, and some of the debate around the issue by presenting
different sides of the crisis. It is physically and ideologically located in the middle of gallery four, which is called “A Violent Peace: The Cold War, Peacekeeping, and Recent Conflicts, 1945 to the Present.” The missile crisis is part of the museum’s mandate: “to convey Canada’s military history to its people. It’s a national museum, it’s trying to tell a national story about how war has shaped Canada…in its national, its international, and its personal dimensions…from the geopolitical right down to the individual.”

Standing in the exhibit which tells Canadians about their participation in the Cuban missile crisis, one hears air raid sirens. The exhibit discussing civil defence initiatives in Canada is only a few feet away. In the middle of the exhibit there is a school desk. It seems a little out of place, given that the missile crisis exhibit is about defence relationships and the political crisis. The desk has a monitor imbedded in its surface which plays Canadian civil defence films, a chilling reminder of exactly who would be affected by the bomb if it went off. This message is strongly reinforced when you glance up, and notice the tip of a Soviet atomic bomb, at least ten feet in diameter, only a few feet above your head and the desk, about to explode. The message is one of urgency; this could have been it, and it was only a matter of circumstances and diplomacy which ultimately stopped nuclear war from happening at that time.

**Conclusion**

The Cuban missile crisis was a scary time, and many believed that the world was in very real danger of being ravaged by atomic warfare. This fear was not a uniquely Canadian experience. Historian Alice George, for example, has shown that Americans

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124 Dr. Andrew Burtch, interview with the author, Ottawa, Ontario, 20 July 2011.
were also afraid. Some built bomb shelters and others stocked up on canned foods. This fear might have been a North American phenomenon, since headlines in the press often stated how far the missiles in Cuba could fly, and that was as far north as most of eastern Canada. But this chapter has demonstrated that Canadians also remember the Cuban missile crisis in the context of the political leaders who were responsible for it. Kennedy has a complicated, but more or less positive legacy in Canada. Castro’s memory is more complex, and has changed over time, but more recently he has been seen in a sympathetic light. Diefenbaker is also associated with the crisis, since the crisis acted as a catalyst for his downfall, and the memory that is constructed about his performance during the missile crisis has also changed over the years.

Do the textbooks need to be rewritten? In 1992, when Don Munton insisted they did, he was assuming that the Cuban missile crisis exists in the “textbooks” in the first place. If these “textbooks” are understood to be defined as a larger awareness of Canadian national history, then yes, to a certain extent, a narrative of the missile crisis exists and needs to be rewritten. We need to understand what people thought and felt during the crisis, what they were reading in newspapers and watching on television. I have argued here that the manner in which some Canadians think about the crisis can be organized by the way they think about political leaders, but that is not the only way to organize this memory. However, this chapter has shown that the memory we have of the missile crisis has developed over the years. The last fifty years of the crisis have shown that to be true, but it will be most interesting to discover what the next fifty years of historical memory of the Cuban missile crisis will reveal.

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125 George, *Awaiting Armageddon*. 
Conclusion

During a CBC press conference following Kennedy’s speech, Diefenbaker was asked for his reaction to the news that Cuba had offensive missiles. He said the “speech naturally arouses a degree of realization of the danger in which the North American continent finds itself…The possession of IRBMs by the USSR, or Cuba on Cuban soil, is a challenge and a danger, not only to the United States, not only to Central America, but to most, if not all of the cities of Canada itself.”\(^1\) It was dangerous because the stark lines of the Cold War which Kennedy’s and Khrushchev’s rhetoric created made nuclear war seem like the only real option. But it was also a challenge, in more ways than even Diefenbaker realized at the time.

This thesis has examined the nature of the challenges and the dangers experienced by Canadians during the Cuban missile crisis. Canadians were acutely aware of their geographical location. They knew if nuclear war broke out between the United States and the Soviet Union, Canada could have become a battlefield. Canadians had access to the same television networks, radio stations, newspapers, and news magazines and were acutely aware of Kennedy’s actions during the crisis. In addition, they had their own newspapers, radios, and television networks which provided ample coverage and information. Canadians were very aware that they were within range of the missiles. Although few Canadian cities would be targeted, many nevertheless realized that they were firmly within the Western, American-led alliance and therefore would be at war.

However, Canadians did not simply sit around wringing their hands over the possibility of nuclear war. Indeed, they interpreted the crisis, and their role within that crisis, in an active manner. In various public and private places, many debated what Canada’s role could be, what it should be, what Diefenbaker could do, and, of course, what he had done wrong. Some believed that their nation ought to have some sort of role, even if that role were no larger than as a mediator and emissary in the United Nations to help the superpowers sort out the situation. Others advocated that Canada ought to be a middle power nation standing up to a behemoth. Canadians disagreed on many issues, including the precise nature of Canada’s role. This thesis has argued that this was a key moment in Canadian history, where the Cold War world of superpower negotiation and nuclear fear confronted the postwar world of middle power identity. It also represented a transition from the tranquil 1950s to the turbulent 1960s.

Protests across the country during the week of the crisis showed how many citizens engaged with this challenge. Picketers outside the American embassies in cities like Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver demonstrated that there was both whole-hearted support for and strident criticism of President Kennedy’s policies. Students gathering in massive numbers to hear their professors speak of the crisis attest that there was interest. Some classes were cancelled, and in others, the regular lesson plan was dropped in favour of discussions about the crisis and its implications. People followed Kennedy’s actions, United Nations sessions, and the movements of Soviet ships and submarines with avid interest. They also watched the actions of Canadian politicians. When Diefenbaker suggested that a United Nations inspection team be sent to Cuba, he set off a controversy. Those who thought it was an excellent idea and perfectly fitting for Canada’s role in the
crisis, strongly disagreed with others who were thoroughly shocked that he should doubt Kennedy’s proof. When Howard Green went on television to discuss the crisis and Canada’s role in it, he was rebuked by those who thought that he was not being frank. Many likely breathed a sigh of relief on Monday morning when they read in their newspapers that the crisis had been resolved, that Khrushchev had backed down, and that he and Kennedy had struck a deal to dismantle the missile sites in Cuba. Parents probably sent their children to school that day without worrying quite so much that the transistor radios in their children’s classrooms would be used to warn of incoming missiles. Castro continued to make headlines with his seemingly stubborn refusal to see that his gamble had not paid off and that the missiles were going home. But even these last gasps of protest were not as disconcerting as the initial crisis phase; the phase of acute terror was over.

The challenge of the crisis for many Canadians also lay in the need to negotiate the rocky terrain between traditional ties to the Commonwealth, the realities of sharing a continent with the United States, and an unbroken trade relationship with Cuba. Cuba was a complicated issue for many Canadians, because while many did admire Castro for what he had accomplished – throwing out a dictator and committing to literacy campaigns, for example – others feared that he would simply become another ruthless dictator like the one he had thrown out. Canadians both admired and feared him. They respected the gains of the revolution, but at the same time, stories filtered through of brutal show trials in which Batista’s people were slaughtered. The Canadian government believed that continued diplomatic and trade ties with a country did not necessarily indicate approval of their policies, but Cold War considerations were never far away.
Alienating Cuba was not an option, because to do so would undoubtedly force Castro to seek assistance behind the Iron Curtain. Cuban friendship groups reminded Canadians that Cuba was making great strides forward in social equality, and that to cut off ties and isolate them would make this process more difficult. As much as he would have liked to, Diefenbaker simply could not completely cut off ties with that country, neither before the crisis broke out, nor after.

Complicating that relationship were considerations of Canada’s relationship with the United States. The personal enmity between Kennedy and Diefenbaker made a close working relationship in this period difficult. But that was almost inconsequential, since sheer size, proximity, cultural influence and historical precedent made Canada’s general support of the United States during the missile crisis a foregone conclusion. Or at least that is what the Americans thought. That Canada should even have to think about their position during this crisis which threatened their existence was baffling for Kennedy and his advisors. They failed to take a proper accounting of a resurgence of Canadian nationalism and the growing segment of the population which wished to see Canada chart an independent course for itself in international affairs. Nuclear weapons were also a complicating factor. Having nuclear weapons on Canadian soil, regardless of what Diefenbaker had said in the past, regardless of NATO and NORAD commitments (which many Canadians neither understood nor felt were particularly binding), was, for some, anathema. Some thought that becoming a nuclear nation would change the way Canadians viewed themselves. Continuing trade with Cuba was an ongoing complication in Canadian-American relations, as many Canadians believed that the United States should not tell Canada what to do. On the other hand, there were certainly those who
argued that such arguments were fallacious, that Canada was an American ally and needed to start acting like it. The tension between these arguments was difficult for Diefenbaker to reconcile, and thus he took his time in deciding his course of action during the missile crisis. It was a decision that would cost him in the months to come.

Many believed that Canada had an international role to play as a mediator and good international citizen. This was how the country attempted to reconcile these conflicting currents in public opinion during the crisis. The crisis became a part of the legacy begun by Lester Pearson during the Suez crisis. Calls from Canadians for Diefenbaker to do all that he could at the United Nations to help resolve the crisis were frequent. The actual power that Canada had as a mediator during this crisis was small, but people still believed that Canada could play a role. This sentiment was the root of Diefenbaker’s half-formed suggestion which he made to the House of Commons on Monday night. Some Canadians applauded him for the courage to make the suggestion, even if the practicalities involved in the execution of that idea were overwhelming.

Comparisons between the Cuban missile crisis and the Suez crisis in October 1962 were also common, although the irony of the situation – the accusation that Diefenbaker did not support his allies, when six years before he had accused St Laurent and Pearson of doing the same – was lost on many commentators. Throughout the crisis, Diefenbaker insisted that if Canada were to play its rightful role, it had to be consulted as a real ally. Some Canadians agreed with him; others insisted that if he wanted consultation, Diefenbaker needed to prove himself an ally worthy of consulting.

These different ways of understanding what the Cuban missile crisis meant for Canada indicate the contested manner in which the history of this event has been told.
over time. After the crisis was over, Diefenbaker’s public image started to shift. No longer was he the prairie populist who stood up for the “little guy” in Parliament. He began to be depicted in gendered language. He was called a “ditherer” who exhibited “flabby leadership” and was responsible for turning Canada into the “weak sister” of the western alliance. His refusal and inability to make a decision, any decision, became the principal story of his leadership. Nuclear weapons on Canadian soil became unavoidable. Whether or not Canadians actually wanted nuclear weapons on their soil became almost irrelevant. Whether by intention or necessity, Diefenbaker had committed the country to these weapons, and its credibility was now being damaged as days went by and Canada’s Bomarc were still unarmed.

Thus the Cuban missile crisis has become associated with Diefenbaker’s flawed leadership. This was not helped by the concurrent association of the crisis with Kennedy’s brave and bold leadership. Particularly after his assassination, histories of the crisis would remember Kennedy standing up to a bully to call his bluff; Diefenbaker looked worse and worse by comparison. Castro, too, was an essential part of this history. He and Cuba have become almost interchangeable in the years since the missile crisis. He is sometimes discussed as a dangerous renegade and other times as a visionary revolutionary. Interest in Castro and Cuba also waxes and wanes with international events. The stories we tell of the Cuban missile crisis change slightly depending on the lens, and often, these stories are told in context of a discussion of a particular leader. But as we have seen these are complex stories, about protest, counter-protest, gender, empire, cultural hegemony, history and national identity.
This study is about the Cuban missile crisis in Canada. It is about a moment in Canadian history where various forces collided and could have exploded into nuclear war. It is about some of Canada’s most fundamental diplomatic, political and cultural relationships. It is about the nation’s identity and where Canada saw itself in 1962. It is about a leader who did not fully recognize the full scope of issues – or the implications of those issues – that the missile crisis entailed for Canadians. It is also about a public which no longer had time for a leader like John G. Diefenbaker who reveled in the past and Canada’s colonial heritage. The Cuban missile crisis was a crisis much larger than the Diefenbaker government realized, and was part of a moment in Canadian history which led to the decline of the Conservative party and the re-establishment of a Liberal rule that would last for decades. It is not the whole story, but it was an important episode in this transition. It was in this most dangerous of Cold War moments that many Canadians faced the challenge of their identity.
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Appendix

Figure 3.1 “Don’ Worry Senor…” *Vancouver Sun*, 26 October 1962, p. C, final edition.
Figure 3.2 “Gracias a Fidel Castro.” DCC, Series VI, Vol. 558 File 845 Cuba Canada and Foreign Countries – International Situation – Cuba 1960-October 1962.

Figure 3.3 “Red to Move”
_St. Johns Evening Telegram_ 5 November 1962, p. 6.
Figure 3.4 “Master of His Fate – Captain of His Soul”
*Halifax Chronicle Herald* 26 October 1962, p. 4.

Figure 3.5 “The Panic Button”
“Some day, Sis, you'll thank me for hanging around”

Figure 3.6 “Some Day, Sis, you’ll thank me for hanging around”
Regina Leader Post 25 October 1962, p. 21
Figure 3.7

Figure 3.8 “Canadian Exports to Cuba”
There must be no war

The authority of the United Nations must be restored! President Kennedy has brought the whole world to the brink of war and threatened the sovereignty rights of all nations to freedom of the seas.

President Kennedy must be compelled by world opinion and the United Nations to withdraw his ultimatum, cancel his order to his admirals and generals and restore the freedom of the seas.

The seriousness of the present situation is underlined by the statement of the U.S.S.R. that "no self-respecting sovereign nation is going to submit to the interference with its shipping."

We are on the brink of nuclear war

We cannot leave the fate of our children and our country to politicians. We must speak out now! Raise our voices before it is too late! Labor and farm organizations, churches and all people's groups should speak and act in this moment of peril.

No war! Negotiate! U.S. must withdraw its ultimatum!

Stop the hand of President Kennedy peace can still be saved! Act now!


Figure 3.9 “There Must Be No War”
Regina Leader-Post 27 October 1962, p. 18.

Figure 4.2 “Hey Neighbor!” DCC Series VI, Vol. 476 File 722/C962 Foreign Trade – Trade by Countries – Cuba 1962 – 1963.
Figure 4.3 “Call!”

Figure 5.1
*Vancouver Sun* 24 October 1962, p. C (final).
"...so we're a dull nation... I'll admit it... but did you ever think that orduliness may be shining like a welcome beacon in a crisis-torn world...?"

Figure 5.2

Figure 6.1, *Toronto Daily Star*, 23 November 1963, p. 4.

Figure 6.2 “The Shrunken Image,” *Regina Leader-Post*, 5 November 1962, p. 16.